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ABSTRACT

Trends in adult and community education (ACE) across Australia were examined. Data were obtained from consultations with national, state, and territory policy and funding body representatives; consultations with representatives of 40 ACE agencies across Australia; and analysis of pertinent literature, research, and policy documents. The study was intended to describe the full range of ACE services and clients nationwide, analyze ACE outcomes and contributions to lifelong learning for a range of clients, and develop recommendations contributing to valid and reliable national data on ACE outcomes. Selected findings were as follows: (1) ACE agencies cater to a very diverse range of adult groups in the community; (2) women predominate, but agencies report that more men are becoming involved; and (3) courses range from basic literature and foundation education through to post-degree professional development. A framework for classifying ACE outcomes according to individual development outcomes (the personal, public, and work domains), community development outcomes, and economic development outcomes was proposed. Identified barriers to measuring outcomes included disparate funding policy and administrative arrangements, data collection costs, and the difficulties associated with collecting meaningful data to measure outcomes such as capacity building. Agencies were ambivalent about data collection; however, many desired data that could be used for planning. (Contains 6 tables and 15 references.) (MN)

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We thank Kate Lawrence and Helen Myles for undertaking three of the interviews.

Members of the (former) Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) ACE Task Force were interviewed regarding state and territory arrangements concerning adult and community education (ACE). Members of the reference group for the project provided valuable input into the agency survey questions and commented on drafts of this report. We thank them for their contributions.

Executive summary

The aim of the research was to provide:

- a useful and valid description of the full range of adult and community education (ACE) services and clients nationwide
- an analysis of ACE outcomes and contributions to lifelong learning for its range of clients
- recommendations which would contribute to valid and reliable national data on ACE outcomes, taking account of the full range of outcomes and the barriers that exist to the collection of relevant information.

National, state and territory policy and funding representatives responsible for adult and community education were initially interviewed. This was followed by interviews with representatives from 40 agencies across Australia delivering adult and community education.

The label 'ACE' is not universally used or understood. The report takes it to mean 'organised adult learning in community settings'.

In terms of services and clients, the research finds that:

- ACE agencies cater for a very wide range of adult groups in the community, including those from extremely diverse income, educational, social and cultural backgrounds.
- Women predominate, but agencies report more men are becoming involved.
- Courses range from basic literacy and foundation education through to post-degree professional development.

The report presents a framework for classifying ACE outcomes according to individual development outcomes (personal domain, public domain and work domain), community development outcomes and economic development outcomes. A set of 20 outcomes as a way of accounting for the full range of ACE's outcomes is proposed.

Identified barriers to measuring outcomes include disparate funding policy and administrative arrangements across states/territories, the cost of collection of these data in a sector with very limited resources, and the difficulties associated with collecting meaningful data to measure particular kinds of outcomes, such as building social capacity.

Agencies are ambivalent about data collection since there is a general dislike of paperwork and there is a suspicion of a statistical standard that appears to pigeonhole activities. However, many desire data which can be used for planning.

The report argues that, if there is a national will to overcome the barriers or step around them, over time, a national system to comprehensively account for ACE outcomes is possible.

The report proposes an approach to a national data collection, noting the many difficulties that would need to be overcome. It suggests two principles and a further two 'considerations'.

Principles

- ACE is economical of time and money at every level.
- ACE is useful for local, regional and national stakeholders.

Important considerations

- There is need to gain national agreement about the scope of ACE.
- There is need for a democratic, representative national structure to broker the collection of data.

The report canvasses a number of ways that performance of the sector could be measured:

- the use of the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS) which is relevant for parts of the sector
- a student/participant survey, possibly based on the current National Centre for Vocational Education Research's (NCVER) student outcomes survey
- a national quantitative data collection based on annual activity statements which could be done as either a census or a survey
- a study (qualitative in nature) over a lengthy period of time undertaken as a research project to identify the major features of the sector, and how they change
- a long-term research agenda, building on this study examining, for example, the connections between participation in ACE and self-esteem.

To sum up, this report provides a foundation on which a national ACE performance measurement system could be built. However, a prerequisite for such a collection would be agreement between state, territory and national authorities and the providers, on a national framework (scope and coverage) and the indicators required by the various players. After all, there is no point collecting data for the sake of it. Consultation with the ACE agencies is critical if this agenda is to be pursued.

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to provide:

- a useful and valid description of the full range of ACE (adult and community education) services and clients
- an analysis of ACE outcomes and contributions to lifelong learning for its range of clients
- recommendations which would contribute to valid and reliable national data on ACE outcomes, taking account of the full range of outcomes and the very real barriers which exist to collection of relevant information.

The specific objectives were to:

- identify the full range of services ACE provides and express them in ways that best capture the understanding of both local ACE organisations and policy developers
- identify the range of groups and individuals for whom ACE services are provided
- provide a concise, empirical and policy-relevant analysis of ACE outcomes, with particular emphasis on outcomes that are measurable over time, in useful, practical and nationally sustainable ways
- describe the barriers to collecting 'proven case' data on outcomes that exist within ACE, and in the ACE environment
- describe a possible performance management framework for use by ACE agencies and funding authorities
- recommend lines of action to be taken by local agencies and government bodies to measure ACE success in achieving outcomes
- contribute to, and align with, the development of a new national ACE policy.

Rationale for the study

The contribution of ACE to adult learning opportunities in Australia is widely recognised. The *Ministerial declaration on adult community education* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2002) emphasises the importance of ACE in providing adults with the necessary 'knowledge, understanding, skills and values' which underpin an educated and just society. It points especially to the contribution of ACE to the provision of educational opportunities for 'second-chance' learners, to its role in providing citizens with the requirements for a knowledge-based society, and to ACE as a force for social cohesion through community-based initiatives.

While the breadth of the ACE contribution is increasingly apparent, identifying both the full range of outcomes from ACE and useful ways in which they can be captured at a local and national level, has to date proved difficult. This project aligns with the ministerial declaration's strategy of

'developing broader and more relevant measures of adult learning outcomes for both individuals and communities which encompass social participation, diverse pathways, and the contributions of volunteers and other community agencies' (p.7). Considerable work has been done in recent years to refine and extend the collection of information about outputs and outcomes relevant to vocational education and training (VET), some relevant to ACE, and others with substantial limitations. The rationale for the present project is the need to build on existing indicators and existing research on ACE outcomes and contributions, so that more reliable measures of the full range of ACE outcomes are possible.

Review of selected literature

Two major reviews especially relevant to the project have recently been carried out. They are reviews of the scope of ACE and ACE data collection (Borthwick et al. 2001a, 2001b) and a review of ACE research during the past decade (Golding, Davies & Volkoff 2001). The reviews by Borthwick et al. and by Golding, Davies and Volkoff have contributed to a broader understanding of the major issues concerning the scope of the sector, the barriers to determining a definition of adult and community education that encompasses its variety, and the difficulties of measuring outcomes.

The reviews reveal a growing body of literature related to adult community education in Australia and provide a useful and relatively comprehensive view of the field. They also clearly highlight state differences in policy and funding for ACE. There is a lack of consistency across states and territories as to what constitutes ACE, and disparate funding policies and administrative arrangements in the various states and territories. In the field, organisations and agencies providing ACE may have education as their core business or not, and they vary in the degree to which they embrace the ACE label.

Nevertheless, there are some well-recognised starting points, based on the existing literature. For example, Golding, Davies and Volkoff (2001) refer to 'an irrefutable coherence in ACE practice, particularly at the level of adult learner experience in community-embedded contexts'. They argue that ACE can be distinguished by the way in which it 'embraces and connects vocational learning, learning for life effectiveness and also learning for enjoyment and leisure' (p.56). There are also some commonalities of understanding and orientation at the state and territory level (despite differences in organisation and approaches to funding) and a wealth of detail about the range of courses, services and participants held by agencies themselves.

ACE policy and administration in the states and territories

Golding, Davies and Volkoff (2001) propose a four-fold grouping of states and territories in relation to ACE. They distinguish first between the four states and territories where there is well-developed community ACE provision (New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory) and the other four, where there is minimal support for community ACE provision. Within the first group, Victoria and New South Wales have state-supported and co-ordinated ACE sectors; South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory have well-developed systems of community provision. In the four states and territories with minimal support for community provision, Western Australia, Queensland and Tasmania have well-recognised provision, including technical and further education (TAFE), and in the Northern Territory, ACE is not recognised as such (p.40). There is also variation in the legislative base of government units responsible for ACE and where ACE decision-making is located in government administrative structures.

National ACE data collection

Currently, all data collected nationally about ACE occurs through the national data collection system which was designed to collect information about the public VET sector. As far as reporting obligations are concerned, registered community providers report on their general education and

their vocational education activity to the relevant state ACE board or equivalent and to the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER); they report any 'other learning' activity to their state ACE board or equivalent and optionally to NCVER. Other non-registered community providers are not required to report any of their activity.

In brief, the ACE activity included in the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard collection is that delivered by ACE providers who receive public funding to deliver VET programs. Also included is the non-VET activity of many VET providers. Borthwick et al. (2001a, p.7) describe the ACE part of existing collections as:

- all education and training activity which is delivered by community-based or community-managed organisations with a focus on providing learning opportunities for adults or contributing to the recurrent vocational, cultural and social development of adults
- all education and training activity whose intention is non-vocational but contributes to the personal, cultural or social development of students, and which is delivered by TAFE institutes, universities, schools, commercial, industry or private providers which are in receipt of state/territory or Commonwealth recurrent or specific-purpose allocations for VET.

Not collected is:

- most activity offered by universities of the third age (U3As) and schools for seniors in states/territories other than Victoria as well as some of Victoria's U3A activity
- some activity delivered by community and neighbourhood houses, community adult education centres and community learning centres
- non-TAFE activity in Western Australia
- non-vocational adult education programs and evening classes delivered at some Australian universities and libraries, and by the Evening and Community Colleges' Association
- some recreation, leisure or personal enrichment activity at TAFE centres, which allows community access to TAFE facilities in accordance with state/territory policies
- some activity at private and government secondary schools
- private recreation, leisure and personal enrichment activity such as that provided through cultural associations (Alliance Francais, health centres, dance studios).

(Borthwick et al. 2001a, pp.7–8)

The current collection is centred largely on those for whom adult and community education is a core activity, and is exceedingly variable across the eight states and territories. Perhaps 70%–80% of activity is reported in New South Wales and Victoria, less in South Australia and Tasmania, and only a very small amount in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. In reality, the national collection largely reflects state and territory government funding arrangements for ACE (Borthwick et al. 2001a).

Using a definition of ACE which covers adult learning provided through community groups, universities of the third age, local churches and other organisations, NCVER estimated that, in 2000, between 1.1 and 1.3 million students were enrolled in ACE, a figure which was little changed from the previous year, and that the activity amounted to 25 to 30 million hours of learning (NCVER 2001). In the same year, the ACE activity of 477 800 people was reported to the national VET data collection (NCVER 2001). This represented between 37% and 43% of the estimated number taking part in ACE Australia-wide. The nationally reported ACE hours for 2000 were 21 158 800, compared with the estimated total of 25 to 30 million hours, which is somewhere between 70% and 85% of the activity in terms of annual hours.

The 1998 nationally reported ACE activity was provided by 936 ACE agencies across Australia (Borthwick et al. 2001b, p.6). The authors estimated that about half the total estimate of ACE

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activity was reported in that year. It is noteworthy that a substantially larger number of community-owned and managed agencies (around 1500) self-identify as ACE agencies for the purposes of Adult Learners' Week. The profile of 1998 ACE students whose activity was reported nationally provides the following information (Borthwick et al. 2001a, p.9):

- Many more females than males participated (71% compared with 29%).
- In general, students were significantly older than students in other post-secondary education.
- Over 80% were enrolled with community providers.
- Just over 60% were enrolled in personal enrichment programs.
- 43% undertook VET studies, about half of them in formal VET and half in informal VET.

There are three broad areas of national VET data collection. The first includes a range of output data on course and subject completions. The collection covers student characteristics (including educational background and employment status), training delivery (including types of programs, type of provider, field of study, level of Australian Qualifications Framework qualifications) and training outcomes (including subject completion, subject assessment and recognition of prior learning).

Information about student outcomes is sought through an annual student outcomes survey (previously the graduate destination survey). This gathers information about students' pre-course and current employment situation, reasons for undertaking training, relevance of the training to their employment, level of satisfaction with aspects of their course of study, and further study aspirations. Currently, ACE participants are minimally represented in the student outcomes survey for a variety of reasons, which include agency and participant concerns about privacy, the perceived lack of relevance of the survey to many ACE providers, its limited usefulness for the full range of outcomes which ACE is concerned with, and practical considerations, such as its length (Borthwick et al. 2001a). A modified student outcomes survey, tailored for the ACE sector, has recently been developed, and will be implemented in 2003.

The third means of collecting data is via the survey of employer views on VET. Two groups of employers are included: those who employ someone who has completed a VET course of at least 200 hours within the two years prior to the survey, and employers with no VET graduate employees. The survey includes employers' views on VET, on training practices and on graduates (including graduates' ability to work as part of a team, to work with minimal supervision, their problem-solving skills and their ability to use current technology). The degree to which employers of graduates from courses run by ACE providers are included in the survey is not known but is likely to be minimal.

We re-visit the current data collection later in this report in relation to which ACE outcomes might align with what is currently collected, which outcomes could potentially be collected and how.

Identifying and framing ACE outcomes

Golding, Davies and Volkoff (2001) suggest that trends in research in the decade between 1990 and 2000 which relate to ACE outcomes, included:

- a broadening conceptualisation of outcomes
- more diverse approaches to measurement
- recognition of a multiplicity of outcomes, including outcomes for society as well as for individuals.

Research during the decade identified a number of key issues which have an impact on analysing ACE outcomes and contributions to lifelong learning for its range of clients. Of particular relevance is the often difficult to sustain separation between vocational and non-vocational programs in ACE. This has implications for how we talk about outcomes for individuals and, as Golding, Davies and

Volkoff note, makes it difficult to 'identify ACE providers on the basis of the programs they provide or in terms of outcomes' (p.98). The decade saw wider acknowledgement of social and economic outcomes beyond outcomes for individual learners, particularly in light of the burgeoning interest in social capital (Putnam 1993 and in Australia, Cox 1995). There have also been attempts to develop a conceptual framework that includes wider outcomes, notably that developed by Bradshaw (1999) for adult foundation education.

Broad ACE outcomes are identified in the key sources we examined. The *Declaration on adult community education* (2002) places special emphasis on the importance of ACE in community capacity building and as a pathway to further education and training for 'second-chance' learners. It also recognises the personal, community and work-related motivations of people attending ACE.

Beyond Cinderella: Towards a learning society (Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee 1997, pp.1–13) identified the following outcomes for ACE. The terminology is taken from the report but the groupings are ours.

- *cognitive development:* literacy and language development; intellectual skills; cultural understandings
- *technical, vocational, and professional skills:* knowledge of technical and social organisation of production; utilitarian and instrumental skills; adaptability to workplace change; teamwork
- *enriched communities:* effective citizenship: teamwork; inclusion of educationally disadvantaged equity groups, for example, older people, unemployed men, women in general
- *personal development:* fulfilment; creativity; satisfying productive lives; formal and informal knowledge of democratic processes; self-esteem; mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing.

Similarly, we can group the outcomes identified by Golding, Davies and Volkoff (2001):

- *educational outcomes:* literacy; numeracy; linguistic development; learning to learn; and pathways to further study
- *economic outcomes:* employment pathways; accredited and non-accredited skills development; knowledge and skills for the workforce
- *social outcomes:* participative, democratic culture; social capital and wellbeing; well-informed citizens participating in social and cultural life
- *outcomes for both educationally disadvantaged and privileged individuals:* wellbeing; personal enrichment.

Despite the general consensus around broad outcomes, attempts to identify and frame the national outcomes of adult and community education have to date met difficulties. Chapman (2002) admits difficulty in identifying models for measuring and reporting the impacts and outcomes of ACE in Victoria. A research project currently undertaken by Chapman (2002) presents ideas for alternative models for measuring ACE outcomes. These include:

> The extent of local community building as a measure of social capital, employment and further education pathways, people assuming new responsibilities in ACE after completing ACE courses, improvements in self-concept and self-esteem, improvements in a sense of belonging in communities, course satisfaction, diversity of offerings among providers, capacity of ACE providers to generate revenue and develop facilities for community use.
>
> (Chapman 2002, p.15)

The literature points to a number of reasons for the difficulties in collecting such kinds of data, some of which have already been referred to. They include adopting a broad definition for the sector that suits and encompasses the range and sheer scope of providers, programs, services and activities; state and territory differences in funding policies; and the mix of accredited and

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non-accredited, funded and unfunded activities under the broad ACE banner. In this report, we have been concerned first, to provide insights into the perceived difficulties of describing and collecting data on ACE outcomes, especially through the eyes of ACE agencies, and second, to offer options for moving forward.

Methodology

Data for the project were collected from three main sources.

Consultations with national, state and territory policy and funding body representatives

We interviewed state, territory and national decision-makers with responsibility for policy and planning for ACE. All were members of the former Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs ACE Task Force or their representatives. The interviews were conducted by telephone and lasted for up to an hour. They explored administrative arrangements for ACE in each respondent's jurisdiction, their current understanding of ACE and details of the work and outcomes of community-owned and managed ACE in their state or territory. A copy of the interview framework can be found in appendix 1. At the end of each interview, we asked interviewees to suggest 5–10 representative agencies suitable for following up. Discussions with state and territory representatives who were members of the reference group for the project informed the final form and structure of the agency questionnaire.

Consultations with ACE sector representatives

Representatives of 40 agencies across Australia were interviewed by telephone. Details of the agencies are outlined below. The interviews, lasting from 45–60 minutes, were framed around the following three key areas of enquiry.

- What adult community education work do you do and who participates in your education program and services?
- What do you understand the acronym 'ACE' to mean; and how do you know when you are successful in the adult community education work that you do?
- What kinds of data do you collect about your programs; what information would you like to have to be able to demonstrate your success and what are the barriers that prevent you from having access to such data?

The questions and the interviews were designed to elicit the views and perspectives of the providers of ACE 'on the ground'; that is, how the agencies themselves see their work, especially in relation to outcomes and impacts, the purposes for which data, including data concerning outcomes, are collected and the kinds of information that would be useful to them. A copy of the interview framework is in appendix 2.

An analysis of existing literature, research and policy documents concerning ACE outcomes

In this report, we have not revisited much of the literature covered in the Golding, Davies and Volkoff (2001) review. Rather, we have focussed on the relatively small number of reports, including Borthwick et al. (2201a, 2001b) and Golding, Davies and Volkoff, which take a national perspective and include discussion of ACE outcomes.

The 40 ACE agencies

Interviews with the 40 agencies form the basis of much of the report. This approach is based on the premise that viable recommendations to contribute to more 'valid and reliable national data on ACE outcomes, taking account of the full range of outcomes and the very real barriers which exist to collection of relevant information' can only be developed by recognising the perspectives and the priorities of the agencies involved.

We took a number of factors into consideration in the final selection of 40 agencies for interview. First, the study was required to be national in orientation and to take account of state and territory differences in funding and administration of ACE. It was also expected that community-owned and community-managed ACE organisations would be a focus. The final selection of agencies therefore took considerable account of the suggestions made by the state and territory representatives, suggestions that clearly reflected state and territory differences in the scope of activity that was funded or not funded. We used our own knowledge of the sector and our networks to ensure that as diverse a range of agencies as possible was included. We were also mindful of including agencies and groups that self-identify as providing adult and community education but are not funded as such.

In NCVER's *Glossary of Australian vocational education and training terms*, the ACE sector is said to include evening and community colleges, workers' educational associations (WEA), community adult education centres, neighbourhood houses, churches, schools, TAFE institutes, universities (continuing education), and universities of the third age (NCVER 2000). In keeping with the community-owned and community-managed focus of the project, the agencies interviewed did not in general include TAFE institutions and schools, except where such agencies are a key component of ACE in a state; for example, the largest ACE provider in Tasmania, and the only one with formal government recognition, is the Institute of TAFE Tasmania.

The 40 agencies include learning centres, neighbourhood houses, community colleges (in New South Wales), community centres, universities of the third age, Indigenous education agencies, agencies which cater for linguistic and cultural diversity, and agencies which offer some information and referral activities.

The final selection of agencies reflects both a working definition of ACE for the project and represents the broad range of participants, programs and services provided under a broad ACE umbrella. While the terms 'ACE', 'adult community education' and 'ACE agencies' are used throughout this report, not all of the agencies we interviewed use it as the primary way of describing what they do. They did, however, identify with the term sufficiently to be willing to take part in this project. The reasons why some prefer other terms and frame their work in other ways are explored at various stages in the report, providing insights and varying perspectives on adult community education.

The selection includes agencies with a range of forms of governance, from incorporated community-owned and managed organisations through to some that operate under legislation and an act of parliament. Included are agencies whose principal focus is 'second-chance' education and pathways for disadvantaged groups, and those who cater for a significant number of participants who can afford to either pay for the services they get, or in the case of most of the universities of the third age, volunteer their time and resources.

The original intention, and the suggestion of the reference group for the project, was that five agencies from each of the eight states and territories be included to illustrate the diversity within each. Table 1 indicates that we deviated slightly from this in the smaller states, to ensure sufficient diversity and to reflect the size of the sector in the larger states. The table shows the state and territory distribution of agencies and whether they were sited in an urban, regional or rural area. The proportion of agencies in an urban area (59%) corresponds quite closely to the (recorded) percentage of ACE students residing in a capital city for 2000 (61%) (NCVER 2001).

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Table 1: Agencies interviewed by state/territory and location (urban, regional or rural)

	ACT	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas	Vic	WA	Total
Urban	3	3	1	1	4	3	6	3	**24**
Regional		2		2	1		1	1	**7**
Rural		1	2	3			1	2	**9**
Total	**3**	**6**	**3**	**6**	**5**	**3**	**8**	**6**	**40**

The report

The report is presented as an unfolding account of the work, activities and contributions of adult community education. We map the kinds of programs and participants in ACE and the contributions that adult community education makes to outcomes experienced by individuals, communities and the economy. We describe the kinds of data on outcomes that are currently collected nationally and by local agencies themselves. The limitations faced by local agencies in collecting and providing data are discussed. Finally, we propose ways in which more robust data which reaches closer to the outcomes achieved through ACE can be developed, managed and collected. We explore a performance measurement framework for ACE outcomes, examine practical ways of moving forward, present a number of options, and suggest strategies, based on our findings, which we believe provide a firm basis for more valid and reliable local and national data on ACE outcomes.

The report is designed to capture the rich diversity of ACE activity and outcomes; to be a useful, practical and relevant document for policy development; and to help ACE agencies explore and clarify their thinking about the outcomes of their work. In addressing these three areas, we make extensive use of the words of ACE agency personnel in some sections of the report. To maintain anonymity, agencies are identified by size (large or small) and whether they are located in a metropolitan area, a regional centre or a rural town.

ACE participants, programs and services

We know that around three-quarters of ACE participants are women, and that women are an even greater proportion of participants who undertake personal enrichment programs. Not surprisingly, on average ACE participants are older than VET students. NCVER data showed that, in 2000, 45% of ACE participants who provided information about their education had completed some kind of post-secondary education prior to enrolling in ACE and 66.4% of those who provided information about their employment status were employed, 11.8% were unemployed and 21.8% were not in the labour force (NCVER 2001). As we have previously observed, the coverage of national information on ACE is partial.

Funding policies in the states and territories and nationally target 'second-chance' learners and other equity groups, including Indigenous learners, people wanting English language skills, learners with an intellectual disability, people requiring foundation education, unemployed people and young people disaffected from school. Information about the participation of these groups is uneven nationally, but New South Wales and Victoria produce detailed annual reports using the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard data collected from their providers, which include indicators such as employment status, cultural and linguistic diversity, learners with a language other than English, as well as gender and age group.

ACE participants: Agency descriptions

We asked the 40 agencies two questions about their participants—a general question about who they were, and an additional question about how the agencies described them, for example, in their publicity and for funding purposes. The responses leave us with many potential ways of grouping ACE participants, all of which make some sense of the diversity.

A consistent theme is that agencies serve the 'general community'. A total of 25 of the 40 agencies broadly described their participants as members of the general community, in that they did not cater to particular groups. Five agencies catered specifically for participants from linguistic and culturally diverse backgrounds; four for Indigenous participants; four for older people and two for particular interest groups.

However, such a grouping conveys very little of the complexity and variety of the work and activity of the agencies or the people who use them. The 'general community' reflects quite disparate populations, depending on the area in which agencies are located. Agencies almost always run more than one type of program, so those who cater for the 'general community' also have targeted programs. Even agencies based around a specific interest, whether computers, embroidery or conservation issues, run a variety of activities which attract diverse groups of learners.

Across the 40 agencies, participants included people from their teens to their 90s; men and women; people who are poor and people who are relatively affluent; people seeking work skills and work qualifications and those following an interest; employed people, unemployed people and retired people; people from all of the linguistic and cultural background groups in the Australian population; people with intellectual and/or physical disabilities; people who have primary education only and people who have tertiary qualifications; people living in urban, regional and rural areas,

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and people who pay for their courses and those who do not. However, the local nature of adult community education means that 'the general community' is specific to each agency, and within this general (adult) provision, every agency tends to be unique in some way. It is also the reality that while agencies may aim to involve the 'general community', they attract certain groups of people more than others.

In their review of ACE research, Golding, Davies and Volkoff (2001) name the following participant groups and discuss research relating to them: women, people with a first language other than English, people living in rural and remote areas, people with a disability, older learners, Indigenous people, unemployed people, youth, and people in small business. The 40 agencies included participants from all of these groups, and some included people from a majority of the mentioned groups.

The ways in which the agencies described their participants suggest that two major continuums are widespread, the first from 'universal' to 'targeted' participants, and the second from 'socially and economically disadvantaged' to 'relatively affluent'. There are clearly other groupings we could use; however, these two seem to make sense, not only in terms of what the agencies say, but also because they are relevant to policy considerations in ACE.

'Universal' to 'targeted' programs

We begin with the words of agencies that highlight the way in which they target the general community, although they recognise that the nature of 'the general community' varies with the area in which they operate, and that there are always groups that are more difficult to attract than others.

> We make a universal bid. There's no targeting. (Large metropolitan organisation)

> We market to as wide a variety of people as possible; we try to suit everyone in the community … There is no typical participant at present. They are very diverse. The stereotype of females over 45 as the main clients has changed. Older people are a big part of our market but they are certainly not the only part. We have a range of people from 18–80. (Large metropolitan organisation)

> Our philosophy is to cater for all. In any one year, we try to offer a range of things that will appeal to a wide range of groups and we market to the general community except when we have a specific course which we target. (Large regional organisation)

> We aim to provide for the whole community. The participants are adults in a rural area who live on farms or in the town. Most are between 30 and 50 years; there are less in the younger age groups. Overall, there are more female than male participants, but it depends on what is being offered and what is needed. (Small rural organisation)

Within the 'general community', most agencies include programs and activities targeted to specific groups.

> Over the years, we have had a 'managing diversity strategy', and we have actively tried to engage various groups. We try to provide for groups we know don't generally have access. For example, several years ago our strategy was more recently arrived migrants. Then there was an emphasis on young people 15–19 years and how we dealt with them, then senior citizens. This year, it's females with young children wanting to get into some work or return to study. We know there are lots of young women out there, although they are hard to get to and attract. This year we also have a Koori strategy to build our links with KODE (a local Koori education program). (Small metropolitan organisation)

> We have two main groups—those who come for ESL [English as a second language], literacy and numeracy and those with physical, intellectual and mental disabilities. Some want work but will never get it. All are discriminated against in some way because of the stigma of their disadvantage. (Small rural organisation)

For a variety of reasons, some agencies specialise in programs which target particular groups of people. For most, they offer specialised programs to specific groups such as older learners, ethnically specific groups, newly arrived migrants. Others offer access to specialised programs to the wider community.

> In our publicity and promotion brochures, we say the U3A is for all mature-aged people not in full-time employment and who want to keep their minds active. (University of the Third Age)

> We have two categories of learners—our members and the general public, which is the community of people living in Canberra. They are all women. Their ages range from early 20s to many in their 70s. One man wandered in one day but he was lost. We'd love men to join but they don't. (Small metropolitan organisation)

> As a multicultural neighbourhood house, our core business is teaching English and living skills to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. (Small metropolitan organisation)

> [Our participants are] Asian Chinese from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with different learning needs and at different stages in lifelong learning. (Small metropolitan organisation)

> Our participants are adults (18+) from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. (Large metropolitan organisation)

> Our program fills a gap not met by AMEP [Adult Migrant Education Program] which entitles people to 510 free hours and access to the Certificate in Spoken and Written English curriculum. That arrangement doesn't suit all people. (Small metropolitan organisation)

'Socially and economically disadvantaged' to 'relatively affluent' ACE learners

State and territory representatives frequently referred to the role of ACE in meeting the needs of disadvantaged groups, including groups defined in policy statements as 'equity' groups and 'second-chance learners', including those alienated by their school experiences. Representatives from the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) described ACE's role here in the following terms:

> ACE is incredibly important for re-engaging those who have negative experiences of more formal education, those who drop out, or who don't have access for other reasons. ACE gives motivation; social inclusion depends on ACE, and ACE creates a safe place for under-confident learners. These are powerful features.
>
> (ANTA representative interviewed 20 June 2002)

However, in providing for the 'general community', ACE also provides for people who have had relatively positive experiences of school, and who are generally able to contribute financially to the cost of their ACE activities.

The following extracts from interviews move through from participants who are described as disadvantaged to those who are much less so.

> The goals in our constitution are to organise therapeutic activities and occupations for the disadvantaged community, and for people with physical, intellectual and psychological disabilities; to help and guide the unemployed and distressed; to engage in income generation as a means of independence from funding sources and to provide constructive activities for the elderly. (Small rural organisation)

> Most of our participants are from a non-English speaking background/CALD [cultural and linguistic diversity] background, including new and recent arrivals. Many of them are disadvantaged because of this and are on low incomes. (Small metropolitan organisation)

> Indigenous women who live in remote communities in far north Queensland are the main participants in the workshops I run. It's mostly older women, middle aged and elderly, but sometimes young mothers attend and in some communities men also participate. Many of the women are survivors of family violence. They are usually described as underprivileged and

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lacking access to services and education because of their isolation. They also live in an environment where violence is prevalent. (Small regional organisation)

The high costs of learning embroidery keep a lot of women away. Normally it costs $20–50 an hour and that's prohibitive for many women. I should say, though, that anyone who tells us she has financial difficulties, well we try to accommodate her without making a fuss. (Small metropolitan organisation)

There is a spectrum in adult community education from high to low cost. We operate in the high-quality but relatively high-cost end because this is where we think we can do a good job. We find it difficult to maintain our quality in the less expensive end of the market. (Large regional organisation)

Women and men in ACE

It has long been acknowledged that women predominate in ACE. The national Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard collection shows that, across all program types, women make up 69.5% of ACE students (66.7% in programs defined as 'vocational ACE' and 72.7% in programs defined as 'non-vocational ACE' (NCVER 2001, p.11).

The predominance of women is reflected quite consistently in over 90% of the agencies interviewed, irrespective of their focus and location, although the degree to which women outnumber men varies. The exceptions, where numbers of women and men participants are roughly equal, are worth noting. They suggest that particular activities attract men.

Men are particularly attracted to our woodwork workshop where we make $60 000 per annum in goods for sale. This is why we have the unusual 50/50 ratio of men and women. (Small rural organisation)

We did a survey a few months ago and we have roughly 50/50 men and women. I had thought we had more women. (Small rural organisation)

Contrary to the general pattern of more men coming to agencies which previously had mostly women, an agency that provides a variety of courses for Indigenous people has shifted in recent years from all male students to a 50/50 breakdown between men and women, partly because additional courses attracting women were introduced.

Shifts in ACE participation patterns

We asked agencies whether they had noticed any recent shifts in the types of participants using their services and the reasons that explained them. They identified the following.

- The introduction of activities to which men relate have meant that more men are participating.

  A number of agencies noted an increasing number of men attending. This is attributed to various factors, including the burgeoning of computer classes (although many women are also attracted to computer classes) and community events such as working bees, which men attended.

  Before we adopted a more community-development approach, women predominated but in the last two years, more men have got involved … Our centre holds a lot of community events including working bees. Men come along to do men's things like construct a bike path and put in seats and a basketball hoop. Now we have men in classes and on our committee of management and it's great to see this shift. (Small metropolitan organisation)

- Mutual obligation requirements have had an impact on participants in some ACE agencies.

  Others come now because of the requirements of the mutual obligation policy. They use volunteerism as a pathway to paid work. (Small metropolitan organisation)

- More vocationally oriented courses have changed the range of participants in many agencies.

> The people who come have changed over the years, mainly in response to our business changing and our developing expertise in vocational training. In reality, the profile of people may not have changed but their intent, why they are coming, has. (Large regional organisation)

- Some shifts have resulted from conscious decisions to broaden the reach of programs and participants. Participants have changed as agencies have taken up the challenge of meeting the needs of marginalised and/or unprovided for groups.

> Over recent years, we've had more people from a non-English speaking background because we have deliberately tried to do this. We have increasingly diversified through setting up specific groups, through contacting other services in the area, finding out what is needed. (Small metropolitan organisation)

> We applied for ACE funding for the Disability and Disadvantaged in the Arts (DADA) Program because we wanted to connect with more women through introductory, subsidised classes. We wanted to promote embroidery to a wider group and educate members of the public on all aspects of embroidery in an introductory way, to give them an overview of its history and practice. (Small metropolitan organisation)

> We try to provide for groups who generally don't have access. ... There are also more people on temporary protection visas ... They haven't got anywhere else to go. Federally funded services are not able to work with them. (Small metropolitan organisation)

> We went through a big change. Some time ago we had one person come in and ask if he could learn English, and since then, we've had 250 people on temporary protection visas come through. We now cater for people from detention centres. (Small metropolitan organisation)

> We have a community programs unit, community development people who work with specific communities; for example, Somalian women or Cambodian mothers. They work mainly with newly arrived groups who are not represented or are overlooked by the mainstream and visible lobby groups. For example, African women with large families are less likely to be heard and to have platforms to push their needs. (Large metropolitan organisation)

- Changes in community needs have led to shifts in the nature of programs.

> At first, programs consisted mainly of job skills and crafts and occasional other courses. The programs offered now are much larger and reflect the changing nature of the clients and we do so much more. This is the main reason why there's been a change in who is utilising the centre. (Small rural organisation)

- Although people in their teens and early 20s have not traditionally been users of ACE, more people in these age groups are using ACE programs and services, especially 15–19-year-olds in Victoria.

> We have an increasing number of young teenagers (15–19-year-olds) participating in the VCE [Victorian Certificate of Education] for Young People and other programs specifically funded and designed for young people who have left school because it's not providing them with what they want. (Large rural organisation)

> There are certainly more young people (12% of participants are under 19) but this has been a deliberate policy on our part. (Small metropolitan organisation)

> There are a lot of younger people (25–35) coming for the first time ... Perhaps there are more younger people because there are young families coming into the area and young mothers are looking for play groups, which we have. While we haven't targeted young unemployed women, there are quite a few who are coming to do something different while they try to get a job. (Small regional organisation)

ACE programs and services

As we found with describing ACE participants, there are a number of ways in which programs can be categorised. Most of the activities of the agencies fall into one or other of a number of well-recognised broad groupings of ACE programs and services. Most agencies interviewed run more than one type of program; many (large and small) had a broad range of offerings. Each broad program area includes a quote to highlight its orientation. We recognise that our categorisation of these programs does not necessarily coincide with people's motivation for undertaking an activity or for the outcomes they gain.

Foundation education, including language, literacy and numeracy

> We have several thousand people in the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program which is funded by DEST [Department of Education, Science and Technology] for young and mature-aged adults whose primary barrier to employment is language and literacy.
>
> (Large metropolitan organisation)

English as a second language

> Our English language classes are at four levels. We always enrol fewer than 10 in the beginners groups. In addition we have: beginners reading and writing; a singing group who learn English through song—they do performances, for example, at citizenship ceremonies; a drama group who develops scripts and puts on performances at the end-of-term parties when we invite people in; English language conversation group. Volunteers come to help people practise English pronunciation. (Small metropolitan organisation)

Personal development

The following quotes illustrate the very wide range of activities included in the traditional ACE area of personal development.

> There is no limit to what people can teach. It's anything that anyone is interested in and there is a great spread. Many people teach their interest, some teach the things they taught when they were employed. We advertise them under broad headings of About Ourselves (e.g. philosophy, psychology etc.), About Our World, Computing (this is a big section), Creative Arts, English, Games and Hobbies, Languages, Health. The type of things offered does change. Five years ago there was a tendency to have a lot of offers around alternative lifestyle things, now they tend to be more formal types of classes. (University of the Third Age)

Specific vocational education programs

This area includes vocational education and training, including traineeships and industry training, and employment services.

> The accredited VET courses we run as part of our RTO [registered training organisation] scope of registration are in these areas: Preparatory education and life skills—literacy, numeracy and life skills at 10 sites; Community education certificated courses; Retail training; Certificate 4 in Workplace Training and Assessment. (Small metropolitan organisation)

General citizenship

> Citizenship—courses such as Women in Islam, and environmental issues.
>
> (Small metropolitan organisation)

> What we mainly do is health education. The underlying framework for the centre is a social model of health, a holistic view of health. The aim is to provide information to women, in order to empower them so they can make decisions about their own health. When they leave us, they move into using mainstream services. (Small metropolitan organisation)

Volunteer training

Agencies described a range of volunteer training, some of which is related to work for the dole schemes. Others cater for volunteers working in a specific area of interest.

> Personal development and community training for volunteers. Our volunteers are retirees, unemployed people who do six months with us on the work for the dole scheme, isolated people who want to be connected to the community. (Small rural organisation)

> We also have a special program to train volunteers which we're re-jigging. The mutual obligation side of things will be called the Community Work and Training Scheme. We'll promote it very vigorously as a pathway to paid work—it includes customer service, occupational health and safety and so on. The other side of volunteer training—the support we give to voluntary committee of management members includes strategic planning, legislation, insurance—is usually done within the framework of their regular committee meetings. It's ongoing. You get new members each year and governance issues have to be taught to all. This support is part of my role. (Small metropolitan organisation)

'More than ACE programs': Engaging and building communities

All the agencies we interviewed are community-driven to a greater or lesser extent, and all engage with their communities in a variety of ways. In the words of an ACE provider:

> It's impossible to separate community learning from community development as they are integral to each other. We're funded to work with all community groups and assist our community to be sustainable in its life and activity. (Small rural organisation)

Beyond specific programs and services, ACE agencies are engaged in the following areas.

Developing and strengthening networks

Most ACE organisations have well-established partnerships and working arrangements with other community groups, organisations, businesses, and industries. They are members of community and other networks and some sponsor community events.

> For me, the 'community' in adult community education is very important. I have joined boards of local councils to push the concept of the college. We have good relationships with them now. They used to run courses themselves but increasingly they ask us to do so. They now do what they do best and we do what we do best. We also sponsor promotional activities, for example, with the Fred Hollows Foundation. They can use our logo. We are very connected with the local community and there is a strong sense of community loyalty in the area. The joint ventures have also forged new relationships. (Large regional organisation)

Building community resources

Others adopt a very conscious community development role and use their programs and sometimes share their own organisational expertise to build community resources. Some examples of this include training people to participate in community care, sharing and developing skills in communities to sustain them, providing access to, and support to use, technology and through the use of mentoring to sustain impoverished households.

> Our AVETMISS [Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard] figures for 2001 were 2500 people and 7300 enrolments. But I realised again as I was thinking about this interview that this is only for our accredited and non-accredited courses. As well as that, we have a range of other activities with high participation, for example, the Community Visiting Program involves about 140 voluntary visitors, plus the people they visit. This is a federally funded program which matches volunteers with people in aged care who don't have others visiting them. It is a strong community building program.

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So, while we have a strong VET and corporate voice at present, there is a lot more we should be highlighting about our activities. (Large rural organisation)

[The college has] four schools of study: Theology, Community Organisation, Women's Studies—Certificate II and III in Family and Community Studies, Art and Textiles. In addition we run cross-cultural training and that's the only one where we work with non-Indigenous people. There's another strand of the program where staff go to struggling sections of the Indigenous community … where people have little or no housing or power—and teach life skills. From time to time they may second suitable students to go with them.

We use the term 'adult education' to account for what we do … I take it to be synonymous with lifelong learning. It tends to be less formal even though certificate courses are taught. But there's so much more involved than vocational education. It's not all work related. We don't find it easy to express all that we do in terms of competencies.

(Small metropolitan organisation)

Involvement in community development projects

Others use their educational focus to build community identities and bond with their local communities. In some cases, they provide for training local community members to participate in the communication and promotion of their local environment.

Classes are only part of what we do. We have a free technology room for the public and we provide a lot of support to people in relation to the use of the technology. We are a drop-in information service. We also have specific community development projects. We hire out our facilities to the community and provide support to community groups who use the centre. We have combined with what was a childcare centre in an area perceived as disadvantaged. Our main activity for the past 12 months has been preparing a large mural and the second phase of this development will be preparing a community garden. We're also just beginning a home sustainability project. People can opt into this. We will develop and implement sustainability measures for households. People will be given support in doing this and there will be mentors available. We are using volunteers for this. (Small metropolitan organisation)

Our activities fall into two broad areas. There are specific courses totally related to what is needed by people in the community. It might be something that they need to meet government and industry requirements such as a food handling certificate, or chemical handling or skills with GST [goods and services tax] etc. We would take that up and we aim to offer it in ways that suit the people who come. If at all possible, we try to run things locally so people don't have to take a day off to travel to the next town, because small business people and farmers can't afford to be away for a day. I often work in with the closest TAFE or with private providers in the area. And sometimes, we arrange for things to be done by correspondence and small groups meet to talk about it. We try to meet their needs.

There are also projects which involve people and through which they gain skills. For example, we compiled an oral history of the area and to do this, people had to learn various skills. We had someone from the State Library come and train interviewers. We trained people to do the recording by computer; then there was digital photography and scanning and publishing work. We were able to get bits of funding from various places. In Adult Learners' Week, we are going to launch a community information project. This will require people developing skills too. So it's a matter of finding something that is useful for the community and which provides people with new skills. (Small rural organisation)

We do Tai Chi, and oriental crafts like Bonsai and paper folding. We also do low-impact oriental martial arts and dance and cooking. The main target group is refugees from areas like Vietnam and Northern China, and other people who need a way into learning. We use these classes to start the learning process and bring them into the community. Isolation is their biggest problem. They are isolated by language and custom. (Small metropolitan organisation)

We bring people together to work towards achieving common goals for the community. We serve the whole community and pride ourselves in addressing community needs. Programs at the moment are art classes, including a mural group which has completed numerous art works in the community; a well-attended playgroup continues to run which is a starting point for many parents to make contacts in the community; a résumé and job applications course has resulted in ongoing assistance for individuals; volunteer community groups run educational and fun activities for primary and secondary school students to strengthen partnerships for youth in the community and [are] run in partnership with our local schools; the Healthy Homes project includes providing advice concerning basic home maintenance and gardening skills; Aboriginal Student Support and Parental Awareness which involves Aboriginal culture and heritage issues; the Breakfast Club program provides 40–60 students with breakfast two mornings per week; the Youth Circus Workshop will be working with students to plan a performance including a band; various health education workshops are offered. As a result of community action we now have a youth worker … Housing gave the community $50 000 for a skate park and BMX track with landscaping and the construction of a graffiti wall to discourage indiscriminate graffiti. (Small rural organisation)

Features of ACE programs

In addition to the focus of the program/course/activity, there are other ways of describing ACE programs and services. They may be accredited or non-accredited; funded or fee-for-service. There are relatively structured programs and relatively unstructured ones. There are tutor-run classes and self-directed groups; in-class, workplace-based and distance education activities; discussion groups, support groups and working groups. It is common for agencies to run both accredited and non-accredited courses. We give some examples of program mixes below, followed by examples of agencies that offer non-accredited or accredited courses only.

A mix of accredited and non-accredited programs

The majority of agencies interviewed ran both accredited and non-accredited programs. For example:

We have five broad areas:

- the humanities program, which includes general studies, arts, social science, languages, writing, and communications. There are not many craft classes. Most of these classes run for 16 hours
- a large weekend program. These cover a range of generally one-off courses in such things as small business, but there are also other topics
- computer courses, some of which are accredited
- accredited courses. This is not big in terms of relative numbers but the funding for these courses is significant. There are about 1300 enrolments and 20 000 student contact hours. Included are certificate 4 assessment and training, some modules under business administration and telephone skills. We are starting to build up accredited courses
- discussion groups, which are largely self-run but have a visiting tutor.

(Large metropolitan organisation)

Non-accredited programs only

For certain organisations, their understanding of local communities' needs dictate that they provide non-accredited programs.

We run everything from craft classes to English language classes. There is increasing pressure for people to have good English skills for work. We run seminars on a range of issues such as seeking employment, legal issues. We have play groups, music therapy. There's a program

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called Literacy for Everyday, run here by another organisation. Then there's [a group addressing domestic violence], which brings together community service workers. We have a Filipino women's group and a world wide women's group, and there are groups for men too. Financial counselling, some children's activities, and a youth club. We have a youth festival, which was started without funding but we now get support from the city council. This helps young people to develop skills in art, music and writing. There is Arts Council involvement. There's a very wide range depending on requests we get. Some are ongoing groups, some are one-off or a fixed-term course. (Small metropolitan organisation)

Accredited programs only

Some ACE providers only offer accredited modules and certificates.

> All our courses are nationally accredited. We run Certificates 1, 2, and 3 in Business; 1 and 2 in General Adult Education, 3 in Arts and Craft and 2 in Aboriginal Environmental Health Work. (Small rural organisation)

Decisions about programs

We asked the agencies how they made decisions about their programs and services. As expected, most take a number of factors into consideration. The factors that underpinned their program planning processes are listed below, with examples:

- 'having a feel' for the community needs

> What we offer is very much what is needed at the time, and flexibility is all. We make our decisions about what is provided by what's required. People feel comfortable in asking for something. In the country, people want what they need at the time. Other adult education places tend to be more interest-oriented. It's fairly practical and pragmatic here. (Small rural organisation)

> Basically, we keep up with where there is a need and we change when there is an expression of interest from people. We try to help people when they need it. I am hoping to organise household budgeting soon, as the area is facing the worst drought I have ever seen. (Small rural organisation)

- reading the community demographics

> We do some looking at changes in the demographic profile of the area; we look at waiting lists and demand for classes. Then there's deciding what we think should happen. For example, the demographics suggest there are lots of single parent households in the area, women stuck at home. Hence we have a deliberate strategy to attract them. (Small metropolitan organisation)

- monitoring data

> We use a couple of ways to decide about our programs. We look at demands from the marketplace from our database, what is working and what is not; feedback from the general public, requests and what they are looking for. We also analyse our figures on a quarterly basis and look to diversified life styles. (Large metropolitan organisation)

- consultations with staff, committee members and students

> We take a number of things into consideration in planning the program. First we have planning sessions, with staff and the Committee of Management. We make use of consultations with students, especially the student forums we hold. We have two a year, at the end of each semester. All centre users are encouraged to take part. We have a guest speaker and discussions which are structured around a number of questions. Students go into groups but they are mixed up, so you might get African women with some young people. We have a couple of open and thoughtful questions like 'If a minister comes out here and asks you what

this place is about, how would you describe it?' We get funding to run these forums. The forums give us ideas for the future. (Small metropolitan organisation)

- ✧ responding to state and territory policy and funding initiatives

> Another thing is that our program is government policy-driven in that we put on what can be funded. We don't have a large fee-based component; people in the area can't afford it, so what funding we can get is crucial. And overall, we are concerned with the most disadvantaged, with social justice issues and with diversity. (Small metropolitan organisation)

Summary

Across the board, ACE agencies cater for a very diverse range of (adult) groups in the community, although each agency is unique in some way. Women predominate but some agencies report that more men are becoming involved, and many that the range of participants has broadened over recent years. Agencies reflect community differences, but overall, they include participants from extremely diverse income levels and educational, social and cultural backgrounds. ACE is flexible and adaptive and caters for groups that no other sector provides for. Courses range from basic literacy and foundation education through to post-degree professional development. They include accredited and non-accredited activities; tutor-led and self-run groups; class-based, work-based and distance-based learning. Both accredited and non-accredited learning provides participants with work-related skills and understanding. But it is the close involvement with local communities that distinguishes ACE from other sectors of education, an involvement manifested in many different ways, through co-operative ventures, helping people make connections, fostering community development, supporting disadvantaged groups, sharing knowledge and expertise, and establishing and maintaining networks.

Reflecting ACE outcomes

Challenges for measuring ACE outcomes

As we have shown, ACE is an education sector where potential and actual participants are commonly described as 'the whole community' or 'all people in our community'. Yet ACE is also the sector where outcomes are commonly said to be particular to each individual learner. This is what people generally mean when they say ACE is 'learner-centred'.

'Learner-centred' does not mean that the individual learner is the sole arbiter of what is learnt and how it is learnt. It does not mean that broad educational values and understandings are ignored in shaping curriculum, or that teachers have no role in shaping curriculum to widen horizons or take individuals along pathways they had no idea of before they engaged in learning. Rather, it means that ACE outcomes are not determined exclusively or predominately by the needs of the economy or some other large social imperative. They derive from the imperatives of individuals who live in particular local communities.

The sheer diversity generated by the desires of individuals is the first challenge for those who want to account for broad ACE outcomes in a systematised way.

A second challenge comes from those who detest segmentation and consciously take a holistic view of their work. The view articulated by the following agency is widely held by adult educators who take a community development approach:

> For us ACE as a concept siphons, segments and segregates our work … We work against this compartmentalisation by taking a holistic approach. The idea of ACE takes me into TAFE cultural classes—personal development rather than community development. The historical idea of ACE in these parts is connected to an approach where someone decides to put things on for others to attend. They predetermine what's to be learnt. If you want to find ACE in [our town] you have to come to us and we'll connect you with the people who wouldn't describe themselves as ACE but are doing more traditional ACE learning activity.
>
> (Small rural organisation)

Beyond Cinderella: Towards a learning society (Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee 1997, pp.1–13) suggests funding policy changes are needed to adequately recognise and support this more holistic approach:

> There is a conceptual inadequacy which haunts present policy and funding mechanisms in adult education and training. It is the insistence upon differentiating between educational programs on the grounds of their perceived or declared vocational orientation. This vocational/non-vocational divide fails to accommodate the rich harvest of various kinds of learning experiences that make up a learning society. It also muddies thinking, distorts values, and perpetuates a whole lot of unhelpful divisions—between private gain and social benefit; between the market and domestic spheres; between men's and women's work; between short-term interests and long-term gains.
>
> (Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee 1997, p.3)

A third challenge comes from the tangle of many outcomes in a single adult education activity. Members of the same 10-week, 20-hour long Tree Kangaroo Study Program in Far North Queensland might be there for: professional development outcomes (current national park employee); income generation outcomes (preparation by a person wishing to establish a tourist guide business); growth in personal knowledge (a retiree with an interest in flora and fauna); a stronger basis for community action to protect rainforest (environmentalist); and social interaction and connection (lonely young person). Each of these participants may also take away an outcome they had no notion of achieving when they enrolled.

The fourth challenge comes from the tangle of individual educational outcomes and pathways in and through community settings that are often not made manifest immediately and will often not bear fruit until much later in time.

> … it's a long process. For example, people do get jobs and create work for themselves. We had a new settler who came here with her husband for his work. He had his job and his friends. She had the children and knew no one. She came to craft at first, then she began to teach cooking, then she went to design school at TAFE and now she has her own design outlet, quite a long way from here. But that's not the work of a moment.
>
> (Small metropolitan organisation)

> One (of our elderly women) said, 'When I came to Australia my family told me I was too old for education and I sat home and cried'. She's a Chinese woman who was a schoolteacher in China. She came to beginners' English and is now in the advanced group, and does the song and drama courses. She's a strong personality who gives out a lot in the learning community here. (Small metropolitan organisation)

The community agencies undoubtedly contributed to individual, social and economic development in these two cases but who could predict these pathways, who could tabulate them neatly and easily for the purposes of data collection; and who could isolate and account for the precise contribution of the community agency?

This tangled complexity need not destroy efforts to identify ACE outcomes as long as all concerned remember that the different types of outcomes rarely, if ever, manifest themselves in isolation from the others, even in one individual learner, and that the complexity is only a problem for those with a need to account for, or measure, what is going on. On the ground, the complexity is part of a coherent, satisfying whole.

The 40 interviews we conducted with ACE agencies showed considerable unanimity in naming the individual, community and economic outcomes of their work. Even the agency most overtly committed to an overarching community development approach was able to identify individual, community and economic outcomes from its work.

One agency went further by using Delor's four pillars of lifelong learning (Delors 1996) to account for the whole of ACE's contribution.

> I understand ACE to mean the full range of learning to be, to do, to know and to live together. We used that framework in my graduate studies course at the University of South Australia. It appears on the South Australian Government's ACE website too. From those four strands you can tease out all that ACE does. (Small metropolitan organisation)

Three domains of individual activity can be said to describe a fully fledged individual life:

- the private domain of family and friendships and personal interests
- the public domain of citizenship, community participation, community debate and community action
- the world of work, both paid and unpaid.

We can readily see how these three domains of activity, while shading into each other, make up distinct but connected areas of activity for us all, and that our sense of ourselves is shaped by the interactive skills and knowledge we use as we participate in each one. We continually move amongst and between all three, almost always using skills and knowledge gained from one domain to improve our contribution and participation in the other two, interchangeably. We are at our happiest when there is a congruence, or flow (Seligman 1993) between all three domains, when our skills and knowledge are neither over-stretched nor under-utilised in any or all of the three domains.

A key recurring word in the interviews when people talked about outcomes from their work was change:

> People change, families change, communities change. (Small metropolitan organisation)

Because change, as in 'transformation' and 'growth', was such a key reference in the agencies' discussions on outcomes we suggest that consideration be given to naming the three fundamental areas of ACE outcomes in a way that emphasises dynamic change. Options taken from the interviews include:

- ✧ changing people, changing communities and changing local economies
- ✧ 'growing' people, growing communities and growing local economies
- ✧ transforming people, transforming communities and transforming local economies.

'Change' was the most commonly occurring word, and is the most vernacular of the options. A mix is also possible as in:

- ✧ changing people, changing communities, growing local economies.

Individual development outcomes: Changing people

Some agencies in this survey were clear that their primary interest lies in meeting the needs of individual learners, whether these learners have high levels of disposable income or none at all. The following are examples from both ends of the income spectrum:

> The programs are fee-for-service. They are about personal, individual development in all its forms. That's our starting point whatever the other outcomes may be. (Large metropolitan organisation)

> … we describe potential students as people who are seriously disadvantaged. They may be homeless people, Indigenous people, substance abusers, people with mental health issues ranging from depression and/or isolation through to those who have a diagnosed mental disorder, and most if not all lack social support and access to networks of people. They are not engaged with or connected with a community. They are not looking for employment or further study as a rule. The kind of personal change they look for lies in getting accommodation if they are homeless, or freeing themselves of addiction to drugs and/or alcohol, and acquiring skills to care for themselves better—better cooking processes, diet, and better personal health care. We might issue a statement of attainment in the ACE literacy and numeracy programs, but by and large this group does not achieve or work towards certification, rather they are interested in personal advances that create better self-esteem and confidence. (Small metropolitan organisation)

The set of outcomes for individual learners which follows below is explained with reference to some of the many forms in which they are manifested in ACE agencies. Often, generalised descriptions of outcomes do not permit the nuanced understanding that can be gained from concrete and local examples. For this reason we make full use of examples from the agency interviews to illustrate the rich complexity of how ACE impacts the lives of individuals. The list by no means exhausts

outcomes suggested by the people we interviewed and does not come near the total range of outcomes for individuals in ACE. It is indicative, as it must be.

Individual development outcomes: The personal domain

These outcomes build or enhance an individual's self-identity, self-esteem and sense of personal agency. They develop social groups as well, but it is possible to trace their impact on individuals. They relate to levels of comfort in the private domain of family and friends and competency in, or knowledge of, personal skills and interests. The terminology comes from ACE agencies; the grouping of comments is ours:

- *emotional wellbeing:* for example, self-esteem and confidence; being valued by others; a rise in happiness; overcoming depression, anxiety and everyday fears; an ability to handle change and movement in life; adjusting to change such as the third age; self-realisation; a sense of personal agency expressed as, 'I can do that,' or 'I can and I will'; ability to conduct personal relationships with more confidence and assurance; naming things for yourself rather than have others name them for you; a truthful naming of yourself and your own responsibilities; involvement and recognition, emotional health; gaining a sense of validation through classroom interaction
- *physical wellbeing:* for example, women's and men's health, physical health; personal wellbeing; preventative medicine; cardiovascular activity; first aid; cooking; diet; fitness; taking better care of the body; more active and healthy older people; rehabilitation from substance abuse and gambling addiction
- *spiritual peace and maturity and achieving a sense of belonging:* for example, a meaningful life; meaningful activity; feeling at home in Australia; completion of a spiritual journey
- *cognitive development:* for example, the grey matter ticking over; expansion of horizons; people always acquiring knowledge and skills for their lives; learning to learn; problem-solving; asking questions; information and knowledge; thinking laterally; mental health
- *communication skills:* for example, information and communication technology skills; verbal and writing skills; using information and communication technology skills to reconnect with, communicate with, family and to research family history and any other topic of personal interest
- *enhanced personal relationships:* for example, parents who want literacy to help children with their homework; connection of people with a mutual love of learning and/or scholarship; working with others to develop common interests
- *home sustainability:* for example, worm farms; gardening; repairs; sewing as a means of home production, budgeting in times of drought
- *creative abilities:* for example, drama; music; the timeless skill of embroidery
- *literacy and language:* for example, language is a basic skill and an empowering tool; how people use it is what's important; social functional English
- *expanded personal choices and pathways:* for example, worthwhile tasks; life skills; accommodation if homeless; a sense of a future next week; better household budgeting when money is tight; better outcomes from tax returns; we have a huge study skills program where each year 800–1000 do workshops with us to gain university entrance through the mature age entry examination
- *mastery of recreational skills:* for example, someone comes to a golf course and gets a hole in one.

Individual development outcomes: The public domain

These outcomes similarly accrue to an individual but are achieved as individual people develop as active citizens through the connections they make in communities.

> We are first and foremost a bridge between isolation and connection with a bigger world.
>
> (Small metropolitan organisation)

> Chairing meetings, approaching elected decision-makers to advocate for change, doing analysis of policies, participating in planning, writing submissions, understanding how your community is structured and how it makes decisions … how to move from private understandings and analysis into the public domain … how to reflect on their practice all the time … what springs from the energy and transformation of interaction between people.
>
> (Small rural organisation)

- *social connections:* for example, fulfilment of the strong need for social interaction; connection with other people; integration into the fabric of society; communication skills; ability to conduct social relationships with more assurance and confidence; ability to use everyday English
- *cross-cultural knowledge and sensitivity:* for example, internal spiritual resilience for Indigenous people to deal with the huge community challenges; learning not to be racist
- *contributions to organisational capacity:* for example, desktop publishing of newsletters; spreadsheets for treasurers and bookkeepers; writing letters, speaking at meetings, active participation in church, sports associations, school-based adult activity; to speak, to teach others, to take collective action; experience of working with others; to address issues such as domestic violence
- *individual involvement in the community:* for example, fill out a form; talk to their children's teacher; go to the school for the first time; join a committee; cater for social events
- *knowledge of community and government services:* for example, the system of government in Australia; more informed citizens about governance and citizenship; more questioning citizens.

Individual development outcomes: The work domain

These outcomes build on a person's capacity to undertake productive work. The work can be unpaid or paid and occurs in multiple sites—homes, home offices, small businesses, factories, large corporations. Work-related education outcomes in ACE include general job preparation, employability, specific vocational training, skills to sustain oneself on a low income, volunteerism, income generation and entrepeneurship.

> The Commonwealth notion of functional English is social functioning English. What has developed over the past five years is that people have gone far beyond the need for this alone. They need a far higher level of English in order to be able to participate in the workforce. The nexus between language and employability is increasing. We are far more conscious now that our role is related to economic outcomes for people … The fact that most migrants have to hit the ground running for work is really starting to shape our approach.
>
> (Large metropolitan organisation)

> The community centre itself offers lots of choice of placement for a volunteer—community support, youth work, respite care, community development, literacy, domestic violence, childcare, administration, and family support—so there's lots of skills to be developed.
>
> (Small rural organisation)

- *skills towards and for employability:* for example, people jumping at new employment opportunities; through short courses for particular purposes; marketable skills demonstrated through work experience; chance to demonstrate skills publicly; certainly literacy skills increase employability; the arts; safe use of chemicals; word processing; desk top publishing; business management; meeting government and industry requirements; accounting for farmers wives, how to get a job; resumes, interview skills
- *self-sufficiency:* for example, of small businesses; farmers who can do their own books and don't have to pay accountants for work they can do themselves; accounting for farmers' wives
- *expanded pathways to work:* for example, voluntary work as a pathway to paid work; pathways to educational qualifications and subsequently paid work; pathways to employment through general interest courses such as motor cycle maintenance; we see them going along pathways;

after working as a volunteer here some go back to study—one went to art college, others do community service courses at TAFE, others get employment locally—two are now cleaners at the (city) hospital, one is a teacher's aide at the primary school; all the local employers know about our volunteer training and they ask us if there's a suitable person when a job comes up; the (volunteer) training certainly helps people develop marketable skills and then they get to practice them in a work environment; we write duty statements for them according to which service they are placed in, they have a contract and they are appraised along with the paid workers; we have a small budget for recruiting and training volunteers; training and supporting volunteers is very important … volunteers often go on to find employment

- *income generation:* for example, making things and selling them through retail outlets and local markets; confidence and skills to start their own small business; sewing for African women as a means of producing items for sale; the incidental income generation that comes from small business start-ups from activities like picture framing courses
- *professional development:* for example, for people in employment; for volunteers; readiness to take on more challenging work; training for professional development which people need for membership of professional bodies.

It is difficult to segregate personal outcomes from community outcomes as many of them are manifested in social settings like communities and workplaces. For many of those we interviewed, a purely individual understanding of outcomes will not suffice. They were often eloquent, and sometimes passionate, as they outlined the social and economic capital that derives from their educational activity.

Community development outcomes: Changing communities

Key markers or indicators of social capital are the elements required for connection with others and joint action—bonding, bridging, trust and reciprocity. According to Falk, Golding and Balatti (2000), the more effective our communication, the more social capital we create. Social capital is the cement of society's goodwill—it connects us with one another to create a cohesive society. When we interact with other people—and with all the products people make—we use social capital to activate our human values, skills, expertise and knowledge. Social capital provides the social infrastructure support for our lives as we move about in a web of elastic networks connecting home, work, learning, leisure, and public life.

The examples offered by ACE agencies of the outcomes they achieve pointed clearly to the generation of social capital, and by implication, made an important contribution to developing cohesive communities.

> Development activity is the key to what we do, and when one thing leads to another, or something new develops out of what we do, or people want to set something up, then we know we are helping. (Small metropolitan organisation)

> The community gets that more intangible feeling of coming together to work together, of giving and receiving. They are connected and interacting. That wouldn't happen without us. It's a positive feeling that they can take action on their own behalf. They can take control. Lifelong learning is a direct cause of this. (Small metropolitan organisation)

> I think we have made an enormous difference in the African community in the area but I can't prove it … (Small metropolitan organisation)

Ways in which community development outcomes were demonstrated included:

- *connecting people to each other:* for example, increased participation in other community organisations—mother's clubs, football clubs—in a more skilled and informed way; emboldening of those who are fearful and isolated to join with others; a disadvantaged group knitting squares for rugs for refugees in Rwanda—one disadvantaged group contributing to the

wellbeing of another disadvantaged group; the community legal service staff come into the language and literacy classes; case workers in the other services refer people to us and we can refer them to services for assistance; people establish networks through conservation education that they take into other areas of their life

- *harnessing existing and new skills towards community building:* for example, we use the talent and experience that exists in the community which would otherwise go to waste as far as the community is concerned; we release their skills and talents to the benefit of the wider community; their increase in confidence and achievement has to have an impact on the community; they learn, then they come back to teach; many of the skills they learn are transferable

- *active citizenship in local communities:* for example, ACE makes a major contribution to the discourse of government and citizenship; better informed citizens, more questioning citizens make for a better society; the student forums (are) about being involved in public decision-making; we do a lot of civic stuff, for example in English as a second language classes coming up to an election, we would introduce the issues, and the processes involved

- *community activism:* for example, we teach time management, program management, how to avoid burnout, meeting management, how to mount a good display; they participate in the community more; they conduct their personal and community relationships with more confidence and assurance; engage in social and political structures of the community; contribute to their community by joining committees and contributing to groups; the learning that comes from understanding how organisations like ours function on a shoe string; they transfer knowledge of tight budgeting to other community groups; they learn how to be flexible, be creative in raising money, how to get other people involved; women in some communities take action—the women here have taken up one of our suggestions and started a grandmothers' patrol around the community; individuals participating in community development and taking their place in the community; recognition that one or two can't do everything—they burn out and then there's no continuity; we teach good governance skills

- *organisational synergies, connections and partnerships:* for example, courses on governance and financial management for committees of management for non-profit organisations (this is funded by the local city council); partnerships (over 150 of them) are our survival mechanism; we are contributing to the community in a broad way when we involve ourselves in groups outside our immediate program—we are going to be involved in a city of the arts program and will be co-ordinating a winter school for practising artists; we run distance learning through joint ventures with other organisations such as the Securities Institute, the Institute of Music; a hospitality group; we have so many partnership arrangements, not just with the 17 community organisations but with the local gaol, the local government authority, every agency we work with in some way

- *cultural contributions:* for example, we made a video and we put on a very successful play about refugee experiences, it was sold out; we participate in major events and festivals in these parts; it was the idea of one of our members to prepare a tapestry for the opening of the new Parliament House and when the national museum opened last year 80 of us worked on another called 'The crimson thread of kinship'; our community development role involves working with other organisations, and specific projects such as promoting reconciliation; we paid for a travelling Aboriginal arts exhibition; we organise carols by candlelight

- *building and sharing community resources:* for example, we have a big community lunch every Tuesday, a large number of volunteers help out, the (refugee/immigrant) students who are shy have to say something and they gain confidence using English; I sometimes help other organisations with their strategic planning (for free); we do photocopying for other organisations because they haven't got the money; a bike path; seats in a recreational area; appointment of an independent mediator between parents and a new school principal to resolve communication issues; we see all around us examples of better community facilities; the community gets tangible facilities from our work; we work closely with the local community health centre around issues of housing and social support and we see they have enough to eat because you can't learn if you don't attend to those things

- *generation of new community groups:* for example, it's our 40th birthday this year and we are starting to develop a database about groups which have begun through our centre and which have gone on in some way and become part of the broader community, groups and organisations that are 'children' of our centre. People today might not even know the history of how a group got started. This will be a good record of our impact on the community
- *enhanced community identity:* for example, they have to find a (Chinese) community where they can test out their English skills in safety, and build confidence to take on the new life here; the staff and students participate in national and international forums on subjects like a spiritual dimension for our age, and on the relevance of Indigenous spirituality to our sense of being Australian in the 21st century; in times past mining and sugar executives thought community infrastructure meant roads, water and electricity … if they were progressive they included hospitals and schools … now they understand that the people who make up communities are essential to their planning processes; specific groups such as the African women, by being involved, by being recognised and encouraged, develop a stronger sense of themselves and they say this is very important to their broader community
- *empowerment of specific communities:* for example, we have community development people who work with specific communities such as Somalian women or Cambodian mothers who are not represented or overlooked by the mainstream and visible lobby group; being part of local government there are some sorts of collaboration that are more accessible to us than to other groups and this gets passed on to people and they feel empowered by it
- *community appreciation of and respect for diversity:* for example, this place allows the community to come together and to accept each other's differences (people with physical, intellectual and mental disabilities, the elderly, unemployed people, and general community members); when they meet in the street they can greet each other instead of passing by as people who have no knowledge of understanding of each other; barriers are broken down; people are rubbing shoulders with others very different from themselves; we make a positive contribution to multiculturalism by the way we operate and by modelling acceptance of diversity—you might get a veiled Muslim woman having to pass a group of young people with lots of body piercing sitting on the steps … we feel we are successful if the woman feels confident enough to ask them to stand up so she can get by, and the young people do so because they respect her right to ask; one person said: 'This place has taught me not to be racist'.

The density of ACE's contribution to community development is readily seen in this selective sketch of outcomes taken from the interviews we conducted. They lose some of their impact by being taken from the context of the agency where they occur, but gain from their juxtaposition with the vast texture of national outcomes flowing day by day from ACE at work in local communities across Australia. These outcomes are achieved as the skills, capacities and commitment of individuals are directed at a group or community where, together, they become more than the sum of their parts.

Economic development outcomes: Changing local economies

With the exception of the universities of the third age, the agencies we interviewed all nominated economic outcomes from their educational activities. Even agencies working with seniors that declare they have no economic purpose whatsoever in what they do, conceded that some participants may well derive additional income from new and improved skills.

An ACE agency with a focus on Chinese communities began without any idea that helping people to find and create paid work would emerge as an important element in their education program. They affirmed the long-held ACE belief that developing skills for work enhances the quality of life of individuals and enriches their contribution to community life:

> At first in this centre—five years ago or more—we just went for community and language programs. Now we have added work because our community needs the work, and to get work

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> they need the skills. Then we see greater community participation because these work skills make that possible. Then we see a general improvement in the quality of life of our community and the people in it. (Small metropolitan organisation)

This ACE agency now supports two programs to prepare members of their community for specific areas of employment:

> The first is a taxi-driving program. Taxi driving is a fantastic job for people with few English language skills because the language needed is very specific and you can start to earn money straight away. We do intensive English language study which is specific to taxi driving. We liaise with the big taxi company in [the city]. Our role is language support and they do the accredited certificate. We aren't an RTO [registered training organisation]. We recruit and support. To set this up we did the course ourselves and then worked out what our people need. As part of the course they do 120 hours of paid on-the-job training which is a bonus for them. Five people in our community are now taxi owners and create employment for others. There are 6000 vacancies in this industry in South Australia because so many move on. It's a great job to fall back on. Forty-eight of our community have done the course with our support.
>
> The second is family day care. We have trained two husband-and-wife teams and another three individual women. We work with DEET's [Department of Employment, Education and Training] multicultural family day care unit. They piloted this approach with us. For those with little English there's two days a week of English language and three days a week that's vocationally specific. We do the support and explaining.
>
> In the end the government benefits because Chinese people are so hard working whatever country they come from. (Small metropolitan organisation)

An ACE organisation in Victoria characterises itself as multicultural and works with immigrant communities. It too has a central focus on employment outcomes and demonstrates that it is difficult to compartmentalise enhanced capacities for work from increased personal capacities and healthy communities:

> Our whole aim is to help people become more comfortable in an English speaking environment, to gain the capacity to actively make decisions about their lives. We aim to link them with a work environment. All ESL students are computer-literate. They are encouraged to listen to the radio, to use the internet, to gain confidence with computers, because even factory work requires being familiar with computerised equipment.
>
> (Small metropolitan organisation)

A small metropolitan organisation in South Australia has a significant accredited program in place that develops life skills and contributes to employment and employability:

> Our RTO [registered training organisation] role started in 1996. In 1997 we won an ANTA best practice award for our work in enabling participants to move from outside to inside VET. We offer Certificate I in Preparatory Education at 10 sites. This is the equivalent of the CGEA [Certificate of General Education for Adults]. These courses attract people with educational disadvantage but who are looking for a certificated pathway. Then we offer community services courses for those wanting pathways to work in fields such as aged care, disability, youth work, drug and alcohol rehab, and mental health. We offer accredited retail training, office administration, frontline management and so forth. We offer Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training; and we are RPL [recognition of prior learning] specialists. (Small metropolitan organisation)

So does a large metropolitan organisation which contributes to productive individuals and organisations:

> As far as helping people generate income is concerned, the main area is workplace training. This is for a certificate 4 and people are fully qualified. Frontline management, middle management and supervisory type training helps people develop organisational capacity and productivity. Computer courses too offer qualifications for work, including the Mouse course. We also do a lot of corporate training for professional development which people need for membership of professional bodies. We work with Centrelink to help people find work: for example, we have an Aboriginal group doing preparation for work; and we have people coming to us for work experience: for example, with brochure packing and letterbox dropping. (Large metropolitan organisation)

Another agency makes the case for the integrated impact of non-accredited ACE programs on individuals, the community and the economy in this way:

> We run 'the secret of successful salt water fishing' with a fishing shop. They get more business and students get (access to) their knowledge about good fishing spots and fishing skills. We help statewide tourism and an aero club by running plane trips for people to see rare parrots. At $600 a ticket we have waiting lists. That's good for the economy, the community, the individual, the natural environmental heritage, you name it. These things can't be untangled from each other. A tall ship famous locally was in financial trouble so we began to run 'rough tough sailor'. People pay a lot for a day's sail and are amazed that their fee covers a baked dinner—they think it's great value for money. That's a win/win deal every way. (Large metropolitan organisation)

Other contributions to economic development by ACE include:

- *productive enterprises:* for example, we have a long-term relationship with a major employer and we've developed and customised effective training for this employer; we do a lot of corporate professional development; many NESB [non-English-speaking background] people are the first to be laid off from work because they lack sophisticated language and we are increasingly getting people in this group to participate, both males and females … the fact that most migrants are having to hit the ground running for work is really starting to shape our approach; literacy is essential for most employment
- *increased number and capacity of small businesses:* for example, we teach small business skills; any of our courses that relate to farm management, land care and financial management lead to developing the farm and productivity; some businesses develop from courses like picture framing; some people have started small businesses in the area of bush regeneration
- *employment advocacy, referral and placement:* for example, we work with Centrelink to help people find work; we have an Aboriginal group doing preparation for work; and we have people coming to us for work experience; by coming here instead of being home alone they make friends and get into networks that help them find work; we pioneered English for a group of women who were preliterate, now most of them work in a factory in the local area; we speak to employers on their behalf
- *micro-economic development:* for example, we've had the community-building program for the last two years … to revitalise small rural townships and the outcomes of this are micro-economic development … museums, craft shops and tourist information centres; some turn craft skills into micro-businesses
- *manufacture and creation of goods and services for sale:* for example, because of our exhibition the girls nearly all sell work all year … people know we have stock and come in to buy gifts for other people or things they want for themselves; income generation comes from the sale of woodwork, a computer lounge where people buy access to the internet, and it will also come from the plant nursery sales, a guided bus tour for tourists and (manufacture of) pottery fountains which will augment the nursery sales; the houses have a market every month and that's a place where what's

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made can be sold; cottage industries have helped productivity on farms; people have created paid work out of hobbies and crafts but they often don't see it as employment

- *savings in health costs:* for example, the community saves a lot of health costs, which would otherwise have to be spent on the wellbeing of the people who come here; the likely savings if we keep, say, 10% of 700 (members) out of a nursing home for several months is many millions for the $25 000 invested in us
- *savings due to greater personal and organisational self-sufficiency:* for example, one way or another we've had curriculum development around sustainability in the area; we developed curriculum around water usage and environmental issues—this clearly has an impact on the community; we always hold the view that even if people are not producing income, they are becoming more self-sufficient as a result of their learning activities; we do some professional development for individual businesses … and an aged-care organisation; we are just beginning a home sustainability project.

We have used the examples above to sketch an impression of the rich array of outcomes that are achieved in ACE, and to discern a pattern for these outcomes that points to their impact. It would be wrong to create too forceful a barrier between the individual, community and economic domains described above. In fact, descriptions of outcomes spill over the domains and are experienced in all of them. Often the intention of a participant in participating in a program or of an ACE provider in offering a particular program expands beyond what was first envisaged. What people expect is often exceeded by what they get, as learning outcomes expand beyond the narrower ones initially anticipated. To do justice to this richness and to recognise the full range of outcomes achieved, a framework for ACE outcomes has to go beyond intentions and focus on impact.

A simple framework for ACE outcomes

A framework for ACE outcomes will have to be simply expressed and simple to remember, for it to be adopted locally and nationally. In developing a new framework we considered the merits of an educational framework such as the six outcomes described in *Transforming lives: Transforming communities* (Bradshaw 1999, p.37). They are:

Table 2: Educational outcomes common to all good education

Subject content	Knowledge and understanding
Conceptual and linguistic development, including language, literacy and/or numeracy	Behaviours, skills and performance
Learning to learn	Critical analysis and values reflection

These educational outcomes can be applied to most programs conducted within ACE. While there is great merit in exposing the ACE sector to the pedagogy of this framework designed for individual learners, by itself it will not capture the full richness of ACE outcomes. A framework that reaches beyond teaching and learning processes to capture the impact of ACE activity is required. We have therefore opted for a framework which:

- incorporates the simple, vernacular, and memorable UNESCO educational framework (Delors 1996)
- cross-references it with the individual, community and economic outcomes so widely perceived to be part of ACE's contribution to Australian life
- uses vernacular language for the most part
- is as simple as possible, given that all ACE outcomes must be captured.

Table 3 proposes a framework to name ACE outcomes along two important axes. The vertical axis identifies the domain where ACE outcomes impact; for example, at the individual, community or economic domain. The horizontal axis takes this further by highlighting the nature of the outcome in terms of four pivotal capacities—learning to know, to do, to be and to live together. The outcomes are necessarily broad in nature so that they can act as an overarching statement for the myriad of outcomes particular to individuals, programs, agencies, communities and local economies. We believe all of the outcomes cited by ACE agencies and state, territory and national authorities are captured by the rich set of outcome 'fields' in table 3. However, the framework will have to be 'tested' by local ACE agencies to see if it can clarify and strengthen their work and is sufficiently flexible to fit local practices.

Table 3: Recognising ACE—summary of ACE outcome areas

Outcomes	Learning to know	Learning to do	Learning to be	Learning to live together
	Breadth and depth of content and subject knowledge understanding	Enhanced skills for taking action	Growth in wellbeing and self-awareness	Strong and harmonious social relationships
Individual development outcomes				
Personal domain	Knowledge of self, the world, and how to learn	Skills for living in the private domain of family, friends and personal interests	A healthy, mature self-concept in private life	Supportive connections in personal settings
Public domain	Knowledge of democratic community life	Skills for democratic participation in the public domain	A healthy, mature self-concept in public life	Supportive connections in community settings
Work domain	Knowledge of work and work places	Skills for finding and sustaining voluntary and/or paid work	A healthy, mature self-concept in workplaces	Supportive connections in workplace settings
Community development outcomes	Collective knowledge and understanding of community life	Skills for joint action to develop community life	A purposeful local community with a strong identity	A community that values and embodies diversity, trust and reciprocity
Economic development outcomes	Local knowledge and understanding of economic life	Skills to develop local economies	An innovative and sustainable local economy	A confident local economy that prospers by making the most of its diversity

All of the educational outcomes listed in table 2 may be integrated with the 20 development outcome areas listed in table 3. In particular, conceptual development and the ability to ask questions are the two educational cornerstones of these outcomes.

The ACE outcomes identified in the literature to date, outlined in the introduction, could all be aligned with table 3. We are confident, therefore, that our framework is comprehensive and reflects the full range of personal, social, cultural and economic impacts of ACE.

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Capturing ACE outcomes

In this chapter, we survey the types of data local ACE agencies collect and their relevance to outcomes, and examine the barriers agencies experience in relation to data collection.

Data collected by the 40 agencies

The 40 agencies we interviewed collect a range of information, much of it either directly or indirectly relevant to outcomes for their participants. Our starting point for discussing the information they collect is to identify the range of purposes for which they collect data. If agencies are not required to provide data for reasons other than compliance and accountability, they have to see some purpose for voluntarily doing so. We found five primary purposes for which the 40 agencies collect data:

- *program planning:* to plan their programs, to decide on courses, to broaden the range of activities they offer, to undertake new activities in community development, to 'verify' their work, and to let them know how they are going
- *funding compliance:* to meet accountability requirements if they are funded or subsidised by governments or other bodies that require information to be reported, to comply with funding policies, and to provide information for funding applications
- *communication and promotion:* to use in publicity and advertising brochures, for communication with other agencies, networks, stakeholders and organisations in their communities
- *administration:* to ensure organisational needs for record-keeping are met
- *needs identification:* to advocate for their participants, to better understand their membership and monitor it; for example, universities of the third age and other agencies based on membership, and to match members and individuals within the community according to their learning needs and teaching interests.

Agencies described the range of ways they employed to collect information, including information directly relevant to a range of social, personal and community outcomes. The data focussed on participants, programs and services. They survey participants, analyse the impact of programs, engage in dialogue with participants and communities, incorporate staff knowledge and expertise, and analyse secondary research and other records.

Participants

Participant surveys

> Once every four years, we have a questionnaire for each class regarding its presentation, content, etc. and whether people are satisfied. (University of the Third Age)

Learning outcomes

> We use a learning outcomes strategy that is used by the WEA [workers' educational association] in London. Learning outcomes are set for every course, and every course has an

evaluation form that asks students, in relation to learning outcomes: 'Can you do this?' 'Are you working towards this?' We find it is good for non-accredited courses.

(Large metropolitan organisation)

Participant 'destination' records

We keep records of the number of participants going on to further education and training and employment. It's a relatively small number—maybe 20 or 30—as confidence and skills are built over a long period of time, not overnight. (Small rural organisation)

Programs

Course evaluations

Course evaluations are a common means of collecting information about course outcomes and participant satisfaction.

We have evaluations after courses, where we ask a series of questions including how the course has benefited them personally, and their (conservation volunteer) group, and whether they would recommend it to others. (Small metropolitan organisation)

In our term evaluations, we specifically ask whether they are feeling more a part of the community, and about their personal wellbeing. In the last survey, 85% of those who filled out the survey said they had increased their knowledge of a subject; 50% said they felt more part of the community and 44% said that they had increased their knowledge of the community. (Small metropolitan organisation)

General service evaluations and surveys

In addition to course evaluations, some agencies run participant surveys seeking feedback on services other than courses and classes.

... comprehensive and regular follow-up surveys of our state-funded programs, often with bi-lingual interviewers. (Large metropolitan organisation)

Facilitating dialogue with community members

The following strategies were used to encourage discussion with community members:

- participant forums, meetings, celebrations to which all participants are invited, often involving evaluation and discussion about what has worked and what needs to be changed
- meetings/events where past participants/students are invited back to share experiences and establish or strengthen networks

With our overseas professional group, we are trying to create alumni, and asking people to come back for a social function. This makes it easier to keep track of them and they can share their successes with each other, and with incoming groups, and we can get an idea of what they need. Providing them with an opportunity to come back helps them to establish networks; it's a real plus. We need to do more of this but it's resource-intensive.

(Large metropolitan organisation)

- student forums
- community forums

We have focus groups in the community. Focus groups are the way we gauge community responses to key issues and how we can respond. (Small rural organisation)

- AGM meeting and reporting.

Drawing on collegial knowledge and 'intelligence'

Approaches to build on and enhance peer-based knowledge included:

- staff evaluation sessions: many agencies hold regular staff and tutor evaluation sessions, for planning purposes, to determine whether participant needs are being met and gather evidence for funding applications
- network meetings: network meetings serve a number of extremely useful functions for agencies. In some circumstances, they are a source of information for agencies about where participants have gone after they leave an agency, their successes and their continuing needs
- community visit reports

> When we're working within project areas or supportive communities, the workers provide a summary of what's happening on the communities, so over time we can see where things improve and where things slide or where things come to a grinding halt. A lot of those things are often related to when non-Aboriginal people come and go. Often a measure of success in what we're doing is that things continue regardless of extra people coming in to the community. (Small regional organisation)

Analysis of research, records and other data

Much data are collected and knowledge produced as part of ACE practice. These stem from:

- community needs analyses: some agencies conduct regular or occasional community needs analyses, through such means as community forums or stakeholder surveys
- individual case studies: occasionally, someone in the agency has the time and opportunity to record some individual stories
- complaints files: some agencies are meticulous in recording all complaints received from participants and refunding course fees without question if the complaint is seen as genuine
- anecdotal accounts of informal student feedback: many agencies keep some anecdotal accounts of outcomes for individual participants, either in a file or in their heads, and record some examples of student feedback. Every agency has stories to tell about individual and community successes
- testimonials and letter of support
- partnership agreements
- data required by funding bodies.

ACE agencies collect a great deal of data. Some is for the purpose of compliance with funding authorities and includes data for Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard and the student outcomes survey. However, the premise for the construction of these data collection instruments privileges funded training programs, vocationally oriented programs, and outcomes that relate to participation in paid work. These programs are an important but only partial component of ACE work.

Other kinds of data are collected for the intrinsic value of the data. This was demonstrated through descriptions of current and potential data collection that falls outside the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard. Agencies referred to other data that could be drawn together to indicate general success rather than individual outcomes, including articles and reports by or about the agency; information in annual reports; staff activities such as serving on advisory boards, taking part in decision-making bodies and contributing to networks; and the number of community partnerships formed. This information is 'on the record' but is not systematically collected.

The reality is, however, that outcomes are generally not systematically and well-recorded by agencies. There are very real barriers to data collection on individual and broader outcomes. They

are explored in the following section. One agency described current data collection requirements from funding bodies in the following terms:

> Other than filling out the evaluation form after each course, the outcomes of what we do (for individuals) don't generally get recorded. It's more focussed on what we do.

What emerges is a dilution of purpose and focus for data collection. Is it to account for the organisation's activities, to account for the impact of learning, or to describe the broader impact on our communities? For whom are the data collected and what do different audiences want to hear? Systems for the transmission of data are lacking, as are channels that feed the data back to enhance organisational development. For the most part, collected data relate to outputs or levels of activity. Data collected on student outcomes are more driven by the purposes of vocational education than by ACE and do not express understanding of the full scope of the work conducted in community organisations. Data collection that allows for the full gamut of ACE outcomes would be more satisfactory to ACE agencies because it would represent their work in more robust ways. A data collection approach with a wider perspective could go a long way to overcoming the barriers that currently prevent collection.

Barriers to measuring outcomes

While individual agencies collect a range of data relevant to outcomes for their own purposes, the barriers to measuring national ACE outcomes, in cost-effective and useful ways, are manifold and intimidating. They are:

- ✧ no clear and agreed national identity or scope for ACE
- ✧ disparate funding policy and administrative arrangements across all states and territories
- ✧ resistance from most local agencies around issues of too few resources and insufficient relevance
- ✧ the impossibility of ever collecting meaningful data capable of measuring ACE's exact contribution to the kinds of outcomes that matter to ACE agencies on the ground, for example, social capital
- ✧ the lack of precedence.

Scope/definition of ACE

We approached a total of 42 agencies and asked them to agree to be interviewed for 45 minutes about their education programs and services provided in community settings. That description had meaning for all of the agencies we approached. This suggests that consensus about the activities and services under scrutiny in this project is possible, across all states and territories and in widely disparate communities. The readiness of community agencies to help clarify the value of their adult education in community settings, to governments or other interested parties, through this project, is most encouraging.

However, concerns about language and concepts suggest a lack of consistent enthusiasm for and a collective understanding of ACE. This may preclude the identification of agencies as part of ACE, which would be needed if a more robust national data collection relating to ACE outcomes system were to be realised. Of the 40 agencies interviewed, 23 use the term 'ACE' internally or in funding submissions, 21 use it in some or all external environments, and 19 never use ACE to identify themselves internally or externally. Two comments from agencies that don't use ACE are given below:

> We don't use the term ACE; rather we talk about learning and training. Even education is too formal and overwhelming a word for many of the people we work alongside. Learning together are our key words. For us ACE as a concept siphons, segments and segregates our work.
>
> (Small rural organisation)

> We don't use the term ACE. Basically it means nothing to me. We certainly call ourselves adult community education but we don't use the acronym. In the phone book, there are 140 names beginning with ACE, they could be anything from a taxi company to a dry cleaners. BACE [Board of Adult and Community Education] promotes a generic community college concept. There is a new logo and a new image for community colleges.
>
> (Large metropolitan organisation)

One interviewee rejected lifelong learning because it 'sounds like a life sentence'. 'Lifelong learning' as a term to sum up ACE is problematic because ACE has no exclusive claim to the term despite being its earliest adopter in Australia. Lifelong learning is now being used by all education sectors and rightly so.

Preferred terms used by a number of the agencies we interviewed are: adult education (2); adult learning (1); lifelong learning (2); learning and training (1); adult evening classes (1); community development (1); seniors' education (1); capacity building (1); up-skilling community people (1); volunteer training (1); community training (1), adult, community and further education (1).

What does ACE denote to those who use it or know it as a term? Setting aside the guesses of those who had never heard of the term (two of the three Indigenous agencies we interviewed), common understandings of ACE are presented from the most to least common. While we have collapsed specific responses to discern broader themes, descriptions of what ACE denotes underscores the 'six degrees of separation' in perceptions of ACE:

- ✧ programs driven by and for the community/a broad array of learning programs
- ✧ a 'not-for-profit' community-based organisation/less formal education for adults not available in mainstream education systems
- ✧ lifelong learning and skills acquisition
- ✧ access for disadvantaged learners/comfortable and local education options.

Choosing a new national name would be a major activity in its own right but may need to be considered in the light of this finding. Can ACE agencies be bound together with a stronger and more visible identity, while allowing for other badging to emerge?

> BACE promotes a generic community college concept. [In New South Wales] there is a new logo and a new image for community colleges. The brochure is called 'Learn; live your dream.'
>
> (Large metropolitan organisation)

On the other hand, we found that ACE, despite some resistance on the ground, is now a well-known acronym and is attracting an emerging understanding. It may well be best to see it as a 'work in progress' in the public domain and press ahead with an educative process to give it a firmer meaning.

In the light of these comments, and other barriers to data collection discussed below, providers need to 'buy into' and see the value of national data collection. For this reason, the absence of a mechanism to draw providers in, such as a national definition or statement about the scope of ACE, may prove an intractable barrier towards national data collection. Such a statement would need to:

- ✧ step around, but respect and perhaps leave in place, the different definitions, terminology, funding policy and administrative arrangements of states and territories concerning ACE
- ✧ include accredited and non-accredited courses
- ✧ avoid the territory of schools and universities but allow TAFE institutes to identify their community programs as a part of ACE
- ✧ be unaffected by the wide range of funding sources used to support adult learning in community settings

- allow the sector to develop a national identity over time by placing the initiative with the local not-for-profit agency to identify as ACE
- avoid locally problematic language and concepts
- be lucid, unambiguous and brief
- be as broadly inclusive as possible of adult learning in community settings.

Disparate approaches by state and territory jurisdictions

By and large, the extent to which ACE is an identifiable sector in states and territories reflects the extent to which funding and branding policies of state and territory government authorities promote ACE as a sector. In our sample, Victorian ACE has the sharpest identity on the ground, while in the Northern Territory ACE is virtually invisible.

The disparate treatment of ACE is a serious stumbling block to the development of a national identity for ACE.

Adult Learners' Week, the annual national effort to promote ACE, is part of that disparity because it is not clearly branded as ACE. In our sample, Adult Learners' Week is instrumental in one Queensland agency identifying as ACE for that week only. Should state, territory and national authorities continue to opt for ACE as the national brand name for adult learning in community settings and for expenditure on Adult Learners' Week, it may be worth considering a change from the more ambiguous and United Kingdom-derived branding of Adult Learners' Week to ACE Week. Alternatively, a concept like 'adult learning in community settings' could be selected for national branding purposes.

Whatever the choice, the maximum congruence of approach by states and territories whether acting together or alone, has the potential to stimulate a much greater sense of national identity.

Resistance on the ground

Resistance on the ground to externally imposed data-gathering focussed around four issues.

- Inappropriate data are required from participants.

  The reluctance of many ACE participants to provide information required for the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard was widely reported in these interviews. Agencies deemed the amount of detail required to comply with data collection as inappropriate to the data collector and participant alike, rendering them unwilling to collect and provide it:

  > Take for example a 40-year old who wants to do a cooking course. Collecting the data is tedious, they don't see the point of it and often aren't willing to give it to us. Keying the data in locks up valuable work hours that we could give more usefully to our program. We get no benefit from this collection ourselves. (Small metropolitan organisation)

  > … but when 75% of people are enrolled by phone … A person on the phone enrolling for one Saturday morning course doesn't want to give you his or her life story. They just want to know if there's a vacancy and they can book in. Like a motel booking. (Large metropolitan organisation)

- Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard data are not perceived as useful.

  There are several significant issues to be teased out here. When local agencies collect Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard data, much of the detail of the collection and documentation is done because they have to account for funding, not because they see any other value for it. For the most part, they do not receive the

data back in a form that generates more insight into local trends and patterns as a basis for planning. Providers in New South Wales stood out, as most find the data useful. The locally nuanced data provided by the Board of Adult and Community Education gave them a way into understanding and using the data for their local planning purposes.

> AVETMISS is too detailed for our purposes. (Small metropolitan organisation)

> The [AVETMISS] reports are useful as an overview of the numbers of students and the student contact hours. But you tend to get lost in the work. (Large rural organisation)

> We have a record of everyone who comes through the door. We have a saying, 'If you don't sign the book, we can't call the ambulance'. But we need no other information. We know enough to be able to visit each other in hospital and send cards when there's bereavement. That sort of information sustains our connection with each other.
> (Small metropolitan organisation)

> I do find it useful. I use the BACE document to compare our profile with the profile of the area by postcodes we work across. I love getting stuff back from BACE in terms of meeting community needs and how our profile fits with the population profile. The program that is currently used is pretty ordinary, but there is a new program being introduced which will allow greater questioning of our information, better for planning. We will be able to query what students are doing what courses. It will allow us to do direct export to a website, to track staff PD [professional development] records, and will allow online enrolments and payments on the web. (Small regional organisation)

> We collect to the AVETMIS Standard. We find it useful because it gives us our enrolments, student contact hours; it's an indication of trends and helps to identify gaps.
> (Large regional organisation)

There also appears to be some mistrust of Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard data.

> It's too hard to get an accurate picture of previous education experience unless you talk to the individual and question them. How people report prior education, how they understand the question; for example, the difference between ACE and TAFE, is unreliable and skews the data … The carrot to entice the ACE sector into data collection via AVETMISS was the promise that surveys would go along with it. And these surveys would give us information that would help us know more about our actual and potential learners. That hasn't happened. More and more got added to the core data instead. (Large metropolitan organisation)

However, all agencies collect basic data on participants. One University of the Third Age provides 75 000 student contact hours at a cost of $10 000 (or 13 cents per student contact hour) to its members. Everyone who joins the University of the Third Age fills out an enrolment form. Another agency has a data sheet for each of the 700+ members, which is complex enough to allow individuals and their learning needs to be connected with someone who can help them.

> We have all the information we need … We aren't going to have standards or exams or that sort of thing. We'd be quite happy to give an annual estimate of our activity as long as we didn't have to prove anything to anybody. We won't have committees and we won't collect needless information that's no use to us. (Small rural organisation)

- ✧ Multiple sets of data are required from different funding agencies.

> Every source of every grant we get, requires a different set of data collected.
> (Small metropolitan organisation)

- ✧ Many organisations are under-resourced.

Overall, anything that constitutes a burden and yields no local benefit is resented. The nature of ACE with its use of volunteers and part-time paid staff is seen to prohibit the time needed to collect data. The 'paper work' robs agencies of time they would otherwise spend on 'the real work'.

> We're on part-time employment contracts. We want to do the work, not the paperwork. We have so much to do we need to be in our community, not spending hours of that time entering data. I would have liked to nominate some of the people here for ALW [Adult Learners' Week] awards but there wasn't time to do the paperwork. I wanted them to be acknowledged. Oh well. Next year! (Small metropolitan organisation)

> When an organisation is unfunded any additional work relating to collection of data is unacceptable. (Small rural organisation)

> We don't have this information because we're busy and volunteers do all our paperwork … God knows if our ACE data could be collected without being a burden. It would help greatly if we had a very basic simple software program that let us enter a weekly count of training, volunteers hours, courses, meetings, drop ins and partnerships … We don't like the paperwork. The system has to work for volunteers who would be collecting ours. (Small rural organisation)

The impossibility of measuring key ACE outcomes

> If people go away feeling better after training, there's a lot of other things that happen, and for an Aboriginal organisation that's your measure of success, and not the piece of paper at the end or necessarily being able to answer the phone in the office now or something like that. It's their general outlook on life; their general wellbeing is the measure of success. (Small regional organisation)

ACE agencies know they make a difference. They 'see' evidence of change, even dramatic change, in individuals, communities and, to a lesser extent, in local economies. But they will never measure this change because they can't isolate or quantify their contribution to change in one individual life, let alone succeed in the more complex task of isolating or quantifying their contribution to social capital and economic capital. Measuring, as opposed to estimating savings in mental health costs and nursing home costs for example, seems out of the question.

In this, ACE is no different from any other educational sector, but other educational sectors use some form of assessment, irrespective of how robust, to measure educational outcomes over time. In so far as ACE overlaps with other educational sectors—in foundation education and vocational education and training—it has no issue with assessment requirements, and there is no need to make any change to these forms of measurement in ACE.

But no one can seriously suppose that formal assessment of individual learning outcomes is a viable means of aggregating or estimating ACE's contribution to Australia's national life. Many of the agency comments attest to this, for example:

> ACE is about confidence and discovering you can do things in a safe place, where you are not judged and where it's relatively inexpensive and where you can only succeed, not fail. In this way, it's more useful to ask about increases in confidence, rather than, for example, whether people have acquired the skills of using a computer. If they have the confidence to ask and experiment, they will learn. (Small regional organisation)

> It would be useful to be able to establish direct links between what we do and environmental outcomes, but this is difficult. There are other programs and establishing causality would be difficult. It would require more people and resources to follow this through probably, but we would be willing to do so if it didn't take up too much time. (Small metropolitan organisation)

Lack of precedent

Australian ACE will need to be courageous, ground-breaking and inventive. There is no apparent precedent for a data collection system that ACE local agencies and national, state and territory authorities have expressed interest in developing.

A reliable and respected national database to demonstrate ACE's contribution is essential for ACE to be recognised, respected and adequately supported. But the system to best gather the data does not yet exist.

Conclusion

The barriers to data collection on the full range of ACE outcomes are indeed strong and explain why national data collection for adult learning in community settings is patchy and incomplete. However, if there is a national will to overcome them, or step around them, over time, a national system to comprehensively account for ACE outcomes is possible. In the next chapter we explore ways in which the load of national data collection can be made lighter at the local level, yet tell a coherent national story.

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Measuring performance

Earlier in this report we proposed an elastic outcomes framework for ACE. It has the potential to be:

- ✧ pegged back to encompass individual outcomes alone; or
- ✧ stretched to encompass individual, community and economic outcomes; or
- ✧ stretched in a different direction to focus on, or incorporate, education outcomes (such as Delor's four pillars or Bradshaw's six elements); or
- ✧ reconfigured to combine one or more of the above.

In other words, state, territory and national authorities, in consultation with the ACE sector, have a range of options at their disposal to 'cut' ACE outcomes for the purpose of establishing local and national performance indicators and targets. We have mapped the outcomes terrain. How and where the emphasis falls is a matter for national consensus by key stakeholders, of whom local ACE agencies are the most important, since it is they who have built the terrain.

> Too often we are the end objects rather than the active subjects of studies of our work. We don't get a say in how the study of us is constructed, and this goes against our participatory approach to learning. These studies don't come close to capturing the heart of our work, which is a learning relationship. Finding a way to name the energy and motivation of these relationships is the key to measuring the outcomes of our work. (Small rural organisation)

The intention of this chapter is to explore what is needed for an ACE performance measurement framework. The possibilities canvassed in this chapter are indeed exploratory. The process to create a framework, if undertaken, will be long and complex due to the barriers described in the previous chapter. Many steps, each one building on the previous one, would have to be taken before a serious attempt can be made to specify a national performance measurement framework for ACE.

Local adoption of a useful, practical outcomes framework is unproblematic. This already happens in every agency, whether clearly articulated or not.

National adoption would take sophisticated political understanding and processes; the deliberate cultivation of community goodwill; a wise, consultative strategy for the medium to long term; and resources.

The principles

Our suggestions for data collection reflect an integrated approach. While there are significant barriers to the collection of national data, our approach proposes use of the process of data collection. To seek the resolution of the barriers before proceeding with data collection may be to miss the point that useful, reliable and valuable data which move dynamically between agencies and authorities based on a framework that recognises the nature of the work and impact of ACE, will inspire involvement and co-operation.

For measurement to be nationally sustainable it must be:

- economical of time and money at every level; neither weighing busy, committed local people down with additional burdens, nor unnecessarily absorbing scarce funding resources at local, regional, state/territory and national levels
- useful and important in the estimation of local, regional and national stakeholders. It must inform practice, planning and policy at local, regional, state/territory and national levels.

Important considerations

Two considerations must be addressed for a useful, practical, and sustainable national performance measurement system to be created and implemented.

- The first consideration is to gain national agreement about the scope of ACE.

  A statement or definition that allows disparate agencies which conduct adult community education and hold diverse understandings of ACE to cohere could strengthen the local will to identify as ACE and participate in national data collection. Such a statement might refer broadly to the nature of the organisations which conduct ACE or to the impacts and outcomes of ACE. For example, all the agencies we interviewed readily accepted the description of what they do as educational programs and activities in community settings. Either way, organisations need to understand and feel part of a 'movement' and identify with its purposes or outcomes as the basis of a desire to promote and communicate its impact.

- The second consideration is that national consultation on the move towards national data collection be brokered by a democratic, representative national structure.

  We advocate the need for a representative national ACE negotiating structure to help overturn barriers to capturing ACE outcomes nationally. The need for such a body does not grow out of the research data. Rather, it emerges from our consideration of the barriers to data collection that did emerge in the course of this project. To this end, we ask ourselves how a clearer identity of ACE could emerge and how that might allow ACE to be better understood by data-collecting and funding bodies. We also ask what structural changes are feasible if ACE is to develop a consistent, workable and democratic relationship with national education policy development and national data collection.

  We envisage an agency able to work productively with the diversity inherent in ACE towards a system of national data collection. We know from other comparable sectors in Australia that such a body could play a pivotal role as a trusted and representative negotiating structure to carry forward discussions about developing a national performance measurement framework. Without it, developments seem unlikely to emerge or succeed. The ACE sector was represented on the former Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs ACE Task Force by Adult Learning Australia, and there can be no doubt that this organisation was at that time the most appropriate body to perform that function. In this chapter, we discuss the development of a performance measure cycle in relation to ACE outcomes, and describe the role that a national organisation, democratically representing the views of member ACE agencies, could play in negotiations with national government representatives.

  The challenge from the organisation quoted earlier to involve them in national planning that will have an impact on what they do, points to the need for a structure to manage a transparent negotiation process. Agencies that decide to identify as ACE need a way of bonding and collectively managing the complex set of negotiations required to reach agreement about the stages to develop and implement a simple and robust performance measurement framework. National data-collecting agencies cannot negotiate with 1500–2000 separate agencies, yet those agencies want a say in how data collection is shaped and funded.

We envisage an organisation with a membership comprising all not-for-profit agencies that choose to self-identify as ACE because they undertake organised learning for adults in community settings. Such an organisation could legitimately undertake to give agencies on the ground a say in shaping national data collection. It could also, in the way that other such bodies do, facilitate lines of communication between small local community organisations and government bodies, helping both sets of people to understand and appreciate the frameworks within which they work and what is realistically possible to do.

Incentives are needed for a national organisation of this kind to grow into a respected, representative agency, with transparent mechanisms to educate and consult with its members, trusted by them to undertake negotiations on their behalf with governments.

The key incentive for the national body could be a grant-in-aid with a payment—effectively a membership fee—tied to each member. For example, the national body might receive a grant per ACE agency member to undertake the required research, and to support regular consultative processes. Over time, a substantial membership, perhaps many more than 2000 agencies, is not out of the question.

The governance and membership of existing national bodies such as Adult Learning Australia and National Neighbourhood House Link are not currently appropriate for this agency, although at some time in the future, they may become so. At present, Adult Learning Australia has neither the governance nor the membership structure to undertake the formal task of negotiating a performance measurement system with the Australian ACE sector. Adult Learning Australia is broader than ACE, encompassing as it does adult learning in all settings, and the focus of National Neighbourhood House Link does not include many community-based agencies that may wish to identify with an ACE body.

Another model for a national organisation exists in the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS), which is an umbrella organisation for state councils. Some argue that ACE is strongest in Victoria because of the partnership between Adult Community Education Victoria and the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres and the Victorian Government. Over time it may be possible to construct a national council comprising state-based councils.

A third, but we suggest far less satisfactory, model would be a round table of existing national bodies. Universities of the third age for example, have voted down all attempts to date to form a national umbrella organisation, so at best, such a round table would be unrepresentative of key interests.

Both the adoption of a national identity or brand, and the formation of a suitable representative body, require careful and sensitive exploration via staged, thorough and transparent consultative processes. These issues might be best pursued by a professional opinion-polling agency, through a single project funded to undertake a national telephone survey of the 1500 agencies that self-identify as ACE for the purposes of Adult Learners' Week.

Incentives for local agencies to self-identify as ACE and become members of a national body might include free membership and access to a quarterly, lively, informative, attractive, good-practice publication emanating from the national body.

The standard performance measurement cycle

ANTA and all states and territories use performance measurement frameworks to determine accountabilities for expenditure on VET and/or ACE. Over the past decade New South Wales and Victoria have used their own version of this performance measurement cycle to evaluate community-owned and managed ACE outcomes.

A performance measurement process designed specifically for adult learning in community settings would rest on the will of state, territory and national authorities; and take some years to construct and become fully operational.

It need not overrule state and territory approaches, but would inevitably bring changes to state and territory approaches over time.

Local agencies and government bodies would have to agree—using a process of representative consultation—on each stage of a standard measurement cycle. The elements of the cycle are listed below:

- *Set agreed objectives:* Stakeholders agree on the scope and value of adult learning in community settings.
- *Define outcomes:* Stakeholders agree on a national outcomes framework that is clear, robust, and flexible. It is simple to grasp and inspiring to use, yet is inclusive of the multitude of individual, community and economic outcomes of adult learning in community settings.
- *Develop measures:* Stakeholders agree on indicators or measures for the agreed outcomes.
- *Set targets:* Stakeholders agree on targets commensurate with the resources available to agencies undertaking adult learning programs in community settings. A state and territory target might, for example, be a certain number of community agencies self-identifying as an ACE agency, irrespective of source of funding. A local target might be a certain number of partnerships with other agencies.
- *Establish collection:* The system for collecting data is supported by allocated resources, is robust and sustainable, and is well understood and accepted by the agencies collecting and submitting data.
- *Collect data:* Specified core data are collected on an annual basis by ACE agencies, the process being paid for and aggregated by state/territory/national authorities.
- *Analyse data:* Data are analysed by agencies, localities, regions, state/territory authorities, national/Commonwealth agencies.
- *Respond through policy development:* Decisions are negotiated about changes to objectives and outcomes in response to data analysis.
- *Renewal:* The well-understood and widely accepted performance measurement process is renewed and begins again.

Options for data collection

In developing the following options for data collection on ACE outcomes, we have been mindful that approaches could:

- maintain the existing Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard data collection to serve the purposes for which it was developed
- modify the existing Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard data collection
- augment the existing Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard data collection with ACE specific data and/or
- generate an entirely new data collection system for ACE driven by ACE imperatives rather than vocational education and training imperatives.

Some of the options outlined below can be considered as largely maintaining, modifying or augmenting existing collection; others would operate alongside or separate from the Australian

Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard. They are not mutually exclusive and we believe that all are viable.

Option 1

As for any other complex human endeavour and complex activity of public life, including all education sectors, what ACE does can never be measured exactly or even adequately by any means. But all of the outcomes we put forward for consideration have indicators that can be quantified.

The sample outcome indicators in tables 4, 5 and 6 show that existing Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard measures could be modified or augmented to capture a fuller, rounder national picture of ACE over time. We provide them as a way of demonstrating, not what a quantitative data collection system would eventually look like in detail, but that quantitative data collection for the broad outcome areas we propose is feasible.

The tables present a framework of *ACE outcomes* discussed earlier and extend it to indicate how these outcomes could be measured. The vertical axis in each of the tables takes the appropriate outcome areas (12 individual development, four community development and four economic development) from table 3. The *indicators* are not meant to be exhaustive or 'correct', nor are we suggesting all should be implemented, or that all would be equally useful if collected. They are framed in the spirit of guiding ACE agencies. They merely stand as examples and illustrations of what could be counted.

The *evidence* refers to ways in which such indicators may be demonstrated.

Status identifies whether such data are currently collected. 'AVETMISS only where funded' means that the general scope of these data is contained within current Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard data collection, but is not of course, categorised in these terms. 'Not collected' means not collected nationally or comprehensively.

Possible *collection methods* make suggestions for how such data could be collected (for example, at the national or local agency level).

These data are capable of being collected nationally and can be reported by agencies or individuals. Current national data collection instruments such as the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard and the student outcomes survey could be broadened to include outcomes that relate to ACE or supplemented for the purposes of ACE. At the very least, changes to course categories would be necessary. It would also require that the purpose(s) of local curriculum be specified, using this outcomes framework. A single course might be counted several times in this system. The system may need to account for certificates and non-certificated courses under each category. The student outcomes survey would also need to be reformed to include items relevant to ACE.

In the development of this framework we have paid particular attention to the collection of quantitative data. While they can measure broad impact, they will never tell the stories that inspire and change practices on the ground. Qualitative data tell stories. They explain the impact of an ACE agency as it grows, develops and generates new initiatives, such as educational precincts, links with local businesses, raises awareness of and celebrates local historical and cultural achievements. We believe that the outcomes would be powerfully explained via substantiation using qualitative data.

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Table 4: Individual development outcomes

Outcome	Indicators
Knowledge of self, the world, and how to learn	Participation in educational programs developing knowledge of self and the world, and learning to learn
Skills for living in the private domain of family, friends and personal interests	Participation in educational programs developing skills for living domain of family, friends and personal interests
A healthy, mature self-concept in private life	Participation in educational programs developing a healthy, mature self-concept in private life
Supportive connections in personal settings	Participation in educational programs developing ability to make supportive connections in personal settings
Knowledge of democratic community life	Participation in educational programs developing knowledge of democratic community life
Skills for democratic participation in the public domain	Participation in educational programs developing democratic participation in the public domain
A healthy, mature self-concept in public life	Participation in educational programs developing a healthy, mature self-concept in public life
Supportive connections in community settings	Participation in educational programs developing ability to make supportive connections in community settings
Knowledge of work and work places	Participation in educational programs developing knowledge of work and workplaces
Skills for finding and sustaining voluntary and/or paid work	Participation in educational programs developing skills for finding and sustaining voluntary and/or paid work
A healthy, mature self-concept in workplaces	Participation in educational programs developing a healthy, mature self-concept in workplaces
Supportive connections in workplace settings	Participation in educational programs developing ability to make supportive connections in workplace settings

Evidence: ways to demonstrate indicators could include the number of courses, number of participants and numbers of students reporting progress

Status: data are currently collected via AVETMISS for funded programs only

Possible collection methods: numbers of courses and participants may be collected through an agency survey; numbers of students reporting progress could be reported through a student outcomes survey

Table 5: Community development outcomes

Outcome	Indicators	Evidence	Status	Possible collection methods
Collective knowledge and understanding of community life	Participation in educational programs developing collective knowledge and understanding of community life	Number of courses, number of participants	Not collected	Agency survey
	Visits, inquiries, referrals, information exchanged	Number of visits, inquiries, referrals, information exchanged	Not collected	Agency survey
	Listings, mapping documents, local data used by ACE agencies	Number of sources of local information used for service provision and planning	Not collected	Agency survey
	Generation of new resource documents for community use	Number of newsletters and other resource documents produced by agency	Not collected	Agency survey
Skills for joint action to develop community life	Participation in educational programs and activities which develop skills for joint action to develop community life	Number of courses, number of participants	AVETMISS where funded	Agency survey
	ACE participants link to other local agencies and use skills gained in ACE	Number of instances where skills are learnt and transferred	Not collected	Student outcomes survey
	Resource sharing to enhance community development skills	Number of projects and programs to enhance community development	Not collected	Agency survey
	Funds provided by local, state and national funding bodies to enhance skills for joint action to develop community life in the local ACE agency	Levels of funds reported by funding bodies. Levels of funds reported by local ACE agencies	Collected by some state, Commonwealth and national agencies	Agency/local/state/territory/national government agency survey
A purposeful local community with a strong identity	Projects/events that enhance cultural life and traditions of local community	Number of projects/events that enhance cultural life and traditions of local community	Not collected	Agency survey
	Partnership arrangements including auspicing, network membership and formal partnership agreements	Number of formal and informal partnerships and networks between ACE and other local/ regional agencies	Not collected	Agency survey
	Strength of committee of management and other voluntary contributions	Records of committee attendance and other voluntary contributions	Not collected	Agency survey
	Relationship between ACE agency and Local Government Association	Number of exchanges, amount of funding received from Local Government Association	Not collected	Agency survey
A community that values and embodies diversity, trust and reciprocity	Participation in courses by equity and other groups	Numbers of NESB, Indigenous, women, young people, older people etc. participating	AVETMISS where funded	Agency survey
	Diversity of committees of management members, ACE staff, ACE partnerships with outside agencies	Number of CALD groups participating within and beyond ACE agencies.	Not collected	Agency survey

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Table 6: Economic development outcomes

Outcome	Indicators	Evidence	Status	Possible collection methods
Knowledge and understanding of economic life	Local businesses employ and train local people through ACE agency	Number of local businesses identifying ACE as key contributor to training and/or other economic indicators	Not collected	Employer views survey
	Participation in courses developing knowledge and understanding of local economy	Number of participants in courses directly linked to the local economy	Not collected	Agency survey
	Participation in courses developing knowledge and understanding of economic life at all levels	Number of participants in courses developing knowledge of economic issues and structures	AVETMISS where funded	Agency survey
	Referrals by ACE to local employers of potential employees	Number of learners reporting ACE as an employment pathway	AVETMISS where funded	Student outcomes survey
Skills to develop local economies	ACE provision of and participation in accredited and non-accredited training	Number of ACE training courses and number of participants	AVETMISS where funded	Agency survey
An innovative and sustainable local economy	Savings on health costs due to constructive participation in ACE	Calculation of ACE health savings on the basis of an agreed formula	Not collected	Agency survey
	Monetary worth of voluntary hours given to ACE agency	Calculation of monetary worth of voluntary ACE hours based on an agreed formula	Not collected	Agency survey
	ACE-based business initiatives and business partnerships	Number of ACE-based business initiatives and business partnerships	Not collected	Agency survey
A local economy that prospers by making the most of its diversity	Participation in local ESL and WELL courses	Number of courses, number of participants	Not collected	Agency survey
	Business involvement in ACE	Number of business people participating in committee of management, as sponsors or mentors of ACE learners and staff	Not collected	Agency survey

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Option 2

Another option is for a system of national quantitative core data collection for ACE alongside the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard collection. This would capture local data through providers completing a brief summary survey.

For example, we have previously observed that all 40 agencies we interviewed do collect core data on each learning participant, although these data are by no means always as detailed as the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard. Much of these data currently go uncounted, as the following comment illustrates:

> I can't see why it would be difficult for us to provide the information we prepare for our AGM for a national database. We always provide a list of our classes for example. These things always have to be approved by the committee but it wouldn't be a burden—that's if anyone is interested in knowing what we do and adding it to what everyone else does. It would be useful to know what the full effort of U3A in our state is, for example.
>
> (Small rural organisation)

It is feasible to propose that each self-identifying participating ACE agency is paid to provide an annual single-page return of core statistics that they might also report to their annual general meetings. This would be the ACE equivalent of the Australian Tax Office's business activity statements.

These annual activity statements might comprise, for example:

- total number of participants (by age, sex and place of birth or expressed as primary target groups)
- total number of courses, possibly categorised in much the same way as the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard
- estimated total number of student contact hours
- total number of formal partnerships with other agencies, perhaps categorised as education, community and business organisations
- total income, also expressed in terms of amount per source
- tabulated notations concerning special features.

It may be that ACE agencies would consider it a fair exchange to submit these one-page annual returns together with a copy of their annual report, in return for membership of a national body and access to a regular, free, national good-practice magazine. This attitude could be tested by a survey.

Option 3

The quantitative data on ACE could be extrapolated on an annual basis using limited representative sampling of self-identifying ACE agencies.

Option 4

Qualitative data about ACE could be collected over time in ways that identify standard practice and features, and which monitor change. A longitudinal study of ACE could take many forms. For example: it would be feasible to select a number of representative agencies across each state and territory, say a total of 20, and undertake an annual detailed study of each one over a period of time. Through such a national project, the agencies could be paid annually to work with a research body to describe and evaluate their work in terms of an agreed set of outcomes for ACE nationally.

This process would add research skills in a systematic way to the ACE sector and would be a source of information that could be used for policy development, program planning and advocacy.

The detailed studies could explore how success can be measured and reported locally to increase understanding of the important contribution ACE outcomes make to communities.

Option 5

A 10-year plan to systematically identify, understand, and promote the broad national ACE contribution to individual, community and economic development could be implemented. This research could take a detailed look at key ideas confirmed by the 40 interviews we conducted for this project. For example, a study of the connection between participation in ACE and growth in self-esteem would assist practitioners and would inform policy-makers.

Collecting useful data

Our survey shows there is much interest in gathering data if the conditions are right. One of the strongest areas of interest is in pathways:

> I'd say pathways in and pathways out would interest us very much. This is market intelligence. Tracking is the key word. We know that 2–3% are Indigenous but what use is that on its own unless we know where they come from, why they come, what they learn, how they use what they learn and where they go next? Do we need resources for that? Crikey yes! It could be done easily enough. A team on a set of phones could use our database and take a few days to do a sample survey and we'd have the data we need to understand our work better and plan it better. (Large metropolitan organisation)

> It would be useful for advocacy and planning if we knew what happened to people when they leave. We'd love to track them into jobs, education and community participation. We'd like to know what they do with what they get from the houses. But we don't have the time, the resources, or the good systems. (Small metropolitan organisation)

Pre-eminently, agencies want their own questions answered and they want the right questions to be asked:

> It would be beneficial if we devised a form of report which included categories (of people) and numbers in different courses, so we could look at the areas that are popular and the areas that are of concern. We would like to have details of course popularity and trends. At present the information we receive is too generic. We need more detailed and more localised information. If I had that sort of feedback I could plan around it. The difficulties in collecting such information are privacy legislation and the reluctance of clients to give it to us. It's also time-consuming for the college. (Large metropolitan organisation)

> Collecting any information can be a burden on time and resources. Needs more thought about what information is kept. Some is only useful at the moment. And some of the information we are asked for is based on the wrong assumptions and asks the wrong questions. Adult literacy is a classic example. It assumes a direct relationship between literacy tuition and gaining employment, whereas this is not possible in some cases. Outcomes such as a man being able to buy a children's book from a supermarket, the first book he has ever bought, so that he can help his son with reading are not asked about, but may be of great importance for that man and his family. (Small regional organisation)

> We don't need to know how satisfied they are. It's obvious. It's self-evident if people keep coming, and they do. (University of the Third Age)

> I think what I'd most like to know is how people use what they learn and how this makes a difference. I'd like to have a more comprehensive way of capturing what they do with what

> they learn. Currently this is difficult to collect because (a) many newly arrived people move around a lot and they are hard to keep track of, and (b) you need more creative ways of getting information from people than sending out an English language questionnaire.
>
> (Large metropolitan organisation)

Qualitative information about community development and what people do with what they learn through ACE would be prized by ACE agencies, as would data about their impact on their local community.

Our interviews with state and territory authorities are congruent with what is wanted on the ground. They want:

- ✧ succinct, summative annual statements about what ACE does
- ✧ data about trends and shifts; pathways including employment and further study outcomes which reassures other sectors that ACE has a complementary function, that demonstrates the wider (than training) impact of ACE on communities and economies; the links ACE has into local communities
- ✧ qualitative information about the issues facing ACE agencies; the progression of individuals; community building; what ACE contributes holistically.

ANTA staff are clear about the use to which data is put from their perspective. They want:

> Hard data for a business case. The business case needs to be the triple-bottom-line-type case where community, economy and environment are all counted. (ANTA)

Most state and territory authorities expressed interest in and support for longitudinal qualitative studies and representative sampling.

Implications

Implications from our research arise directly from the discussion of issues in this chapter; that is, from the principles and important considerations if a useful, practical and sustainable national ACE performance measurement system is ever to be created and implemented. Other substantial issues identified in this chapter which have implications for the outcomes of ACE, include the need for co-operation relating to, and widespread understanding of the nature of a performance measurement cycle and a thorough exploration of the various options offered for possible approaches to data collection. Above all, the implications rest on the efficacy of moving forward in a consultative, steady way, together with ACE agencies, recognising the diversity of the ACE sector, taking account of the realities in which they operate, and striving for agreement about processes that are simple and useful.

The tenor of our suggestions hinges on the need for ongoing consultation between ACE stakeholders. They are framed in the spirit of proposals and options for moving forward rather than as firm directives, because of the amount of work and thinking over time that will be necessary to reach the most effective outcome.

State, territory and national authorities may wish to consult thoroughly and transparently with agencies on the ground, with a view to:

- ✧ adopting an agreed national framework which captures the rich and comprehensive education outcomes from organised adult learning in community settings, using the framework in this report as a starting point for further consultation
- ✧ investigating the merits of options put forward in this report, and any other options forthcoming from stakeholders, to measure outcomes from adult learning in community settings, through a data-collection process which is:
  - supported by agencies on the ground

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- cost-effective
- useful

- ✧ considering unifying strategies to broaden the number of agencies delivering adult learning in community settings that identify with the sector for the purposes of data collection about outcomes
- ✧ considering the positive role a national body representative of ACE could play to negotiate on behalf of member agencies at the national level concerning the identification and measurement of ACE outcomes
- ✧ undertaking a planned professional development program to assist agencies to use the outcomes framework as an aid to planning, data collection, and evaluation.

Conclusion

Organised adult learning in community settings is widespread in all local Australian communities and will continue to flourish irrespective of any intervention arising from this or other projects. Adult learning in community settings is immensely varied and its local shape is moulded by local imperatives.

The outcomes reported in this study confirm that the impact of adult learning in community settings is strong and varied. The willingness of the agencies to participate in this study testifies to their desire to achieving increased recognition for, and visibility of the complex nature of work in ACE and the outcomes it achieves. Such enthusiasm should translate into a national will to contribute to national data collected on ACE that resonates with the kinds of outcomes achieved by ACE, data which are deemed valuable and useful, and which feed into the needs of stakeholders at local and national levels. A consultative, democratic process will work to bind this sector and forge a stronger identity for, and better understanding of the contribution of adult learning in community settings. That contribution serves the interests of local communities, and the nation.

If there is general consensus that adult learning in community settings is valuable and deserves greater recognition and support, then a clearly defined, well-organised, and well-supported national sector will emerge.

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Appendix 1: Interview map for state/territory/ANTA members of MCEETYA ACE Task Force

The purpose of this map is to outline the ground we would like to cover in conversation with you. The questions are identified to trigger your thinking. We do not anticipate that it would be necessary or appropriate to address each question but we have identified them to point to the kinds of information we are seeking.

Part 1: What ACE work do you do?

What is your jurisdiction re ACE? Where is ACE decision-making located in your (government department) structures? Is there a legislated role for ACE? Is there an advisory body? Are there designated public servants responsible for ACE? Are there ACE peak bodies in your jurisdiction?

What definition of ACE do you use? What organisations are identified as ACE? How many are RTOs? What is the scope of programs/services offered?

Level of funds committed to ACE by state/territory government? Who decides how funds are allocated? What organisations and what programs are funded?

Number of enrolments and student contact hours ACE reports? (This is probably in NCVER data but we need to check this with you.)

Who are the clients/participants of ACE? How are they described in your documentation/data collection?

Scope and dimension of ACE existing outside your formal jurisdiction? Any estimates or data on its size and scope?

Part 2: How do you know when your own ACE work is successful?

What does ACE do best in your opinion?

What ACE activity do you count? What formal measures of performance—completion rates, student contact hours, cost per student contact hour, student satisfaction surveys etc.—are in place? Do you use any other indicators to determine whether the ACE work you do is successful?

Are there other ways you know you are successful? For example, you've just put the phone down after talking to one/all of the following and you feel good—what was said to you to make you feel you'd done your job well?

ACE sector representative

Politician

Your line manager

If you had double the funds for ACE in the next 12 months, what would you spend them on?

Part 3: What barriers stop you from getting access to data that demonstrate ACE success?

When you come off the phone after talking to a sector representative, politician, line manager, what information do you wish you had, to prove that ACE is effective?

Why don't you have this information?

Can it ever be collected in ways that are cost-effective? Can it be gathered in ways that don't make people weary, and be useful to all stakeholders?

Part 4: Other matters—where relevant

Do you know of any local/national ACE texts which provide an insightful/comprehensive account of ACE outcomes and which we must include in our literature survey?

Are there any key questions about ACE outcomes which you feel must be asked of the 40 representative ACE organisations we will survey?

Which half dozen community-based agencies should we consider following up for interview in your jurisdiction? We want to cover a broad range of agencies nationally—large, small, obvious, less obvious and so forth.

Appendix 2: Interview questions for ACE agencies

The three key questions in this survey are:

Who participates in adult community education (ACE)? What ACE work do you do?

How do you know when you are successful in the adult community education (ACE) work that you do?

What kinds of data do you collect about your programs and what are the barriers that stop you from getting access to information that demonstrates the success of your ACE work?

Part 1: In this section we want to find out who participates in the educational/ services of your agency

Who are the participants in your education programs/services? (age, gender, cultural background, individuals, groups, community, small business etc.)

How do you describe these participants in e.g. your promotional brochures, funding submissions, annual reports?

Approximately how many people use your educational programs/services each year?

Have the sorts of people who come changed in recent years? If so, how, and do you know why?

What teaching/learning programs/services are provided by your agency?

How do you decide which educational programs/services you will provide each year?

Part 2: In this section we want to find out the strengths of your educational programs/services, and how they contribute to individuals, communities, and the economy

Do you use the term/phrase adult community education (ACE) to describe any of your activities?

What do you understand the term 'ACE' to mean?

How do you know when people grow and develop from the teaching/learning activities you do (the individual outcomes you achieve)?

In what ways does the work you do help people to:

Generate income/develop organisational capacity and productivity?

Find/create paid work?

How do you know when your community benefits from the educational/learning work you do?

If someone asks: 'How do you know you're successful at what you do?' how would you sum this up?

Part 3: In this section we want to find out about the data you collect and the kinds of data that you think would be useful to demonstrate the success of ACE work

What information (data) do you collect which tells you how your work is helping people and communities?

Do you participate in the national provider data collection known as AVETMISS?

If you don't participate in AVETMISS why not? If you do, how does this data-collection process help you to know you are successful?

What information do you wish you had (and don't have) when you're trying to prove your ACE work makes a difference to people and communities?

What makes it hard for you to collect this information?

Could this information ever be collected in ways that are not a burden on your time and resources?

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